

Some Questions and Answers

Regarding the Human Sexuality decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

This document is the work of Bishop Martin Wells; mshmmwells@aol.com, and is offered to assist members and congregations of the Eastern Washington and Idaho Synod in their discernment.

1. What decisions were made at the Churchwide Assembly, August 2009?
 - Passed a Social Statement entitled “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust”
 - Passed a resolution urging all members to bear the burdens of one another, especially those with consciences bound by a different understanding regarding human sexuality.
 - Passed a resolution permitting congregations that choose to do so to recognize publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gendered relationships.
 - Passed a resolution confirming that the church is now prepared to find a way to roster otherwise qualified candidates for ministry who are in publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gendered relationships.
 - Passed a resolution directing the Churchwide organization to propose changes to the governing documents and policies of the Church to permit the rostering of such candidates.
 - For complete news of the Assembly see: <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly.aspx>.
2. What happens now?
 - The Churchwide organization is working this fall to propose changes to governing and policy documents. The Conference of Bishops will offer advice on these changes. The ELCA Church council will receive the proposed changes and consider them at a November 2009 meeting. When the changes have been approved by the Church Council they will go into effect. No changes in the practice of the Church will occur until the Church Council approves these changes.
3. How did we get to this place in our life together as the ELCA?
 - These decisions have been in process since 2001 when our church, by the vote of a Churchwide Assembly, first proposed a new social statement on human sexuality and questions related to the rostering of pastors who were gay or lesbian in their self-understanding. Study materials for the Journey Together Faithfully effort, parts I, II, and III, are available at www.elca.org/journeyfaithfully. These actions are not the result of a top-down church that issues edicts. These matters arose, bottom-up, from members of the church who asked for these actions.
4. Do these decisions require members to agree with what was done?
 - Provision has been made in the resolutions for those persons who must decline to follow the new standards. To quote from the amended text of Resolution 4: *“Resolved that the ELCA make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe this church should not call or roster people in publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gendered relationships.”*
5. Will our congregation be required to call or consider calling candidates who are gay and in life-long relationships?
 - No, the congregations will continue to consider and call candidates they choose by the same processes used today.
6. So where will these candidates, newly received on the rosters of the church, go?
 - They will go to congregations who, because of the missional needs of the congregation, call them to serve as pastor.

7. How were these changes decided and who was the decision-maker?
 - Because these were proposed as new standards for the rostered leaders of this Church these policies needed to be national in scope. The task of setting standards for the rostered leaders of the Church is vested in the Churchwide organization, one of three interdependent expressions of the ELCA. Many years of Task Force work, hearings, study documents, bible studies and revisions have been devoted to bringing the work to fruition. At the 2007 Churchwide Assembly the voting members asked the Sexuality Task Force, authors of the Social Statement, to bring recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly concerning the rostering of candidates who were gay in their self understanding. The four recommendations are the ones referred to above in question number 1.
8. Who makes up the Churchwide Assembly?
 - Voting members of the Churchwide assembly come from the congregations of this Church. In this way the Assembly is said to be inherently representational. Voting members are nominated and elected at Synod Assemblies. 60 percent are lay members of the Church; 40% are clergy. Half are men and half are women. 10% of the voting members are persons of color or persons whose primary language is other than English. All 65 bishops are voting members as are the 4 officers of the Churchwide organization.
9. When did the Eastern Washington and Idaho Synod elect its voting members and how many are there?
 - The Voting members from this synod were elected a year in advance of the Churchwide Assembly. Our synod elects six members of an eight person delegation and the total number of voting members is determined by the proportion of the membership of the ELCA represented by our synod membership. The bishop and the Synod Vice President are automatically members of this delegation. An open nomination process is used and congregations are encouraged to nominate candidates for Voting Member. At the April 2010 Synod Assembly we will nominate a new slate of Voting Members for the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. Nomination forms will be available on the synod website, www.ewaidssynod.org.
10. Is the Social Statement a legal document that must be followed in our Church? Is it the required teaching on the subject?
 - Social statements are teaching documents and are offered to give assistance, guidance, resources, and direction to the teaching of this Church. Teaching documents do not set mandatory requirements.
The statement can be found at: <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly/Actions.aspx>
11. Resolution 1 (above) refers to “bearing one another’s burdens” and something called the “bound conscience.” What is the source of these terms and where can I find an explanation?
 - The first notion comes directly from scripture. “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2. For a resource on Luther’s understanding of this passage see: <http://lutheranspersisting.wordpress.com/david-yeago-in-the-aftermath>. Dr. Yeago is a professor at our Southern Seminary.
 - The notion of the bound conscience comes from Martin Luther’s reflections on 1 Cor 8. See Tim Wengert, “Reflections on the Bound Conscience in Lutheran Theology,” at www.elca.org. (Enter the title of the essay in the search box). It is critical to remember that when the bound conscience is referred to it is someone else’s bound conscience that deserves to be honored. Each of us is bound by the conscience of the other. See Paul’s response in 1 Corinthians 8. This is how we respect one another in the midst of our deepest disagreements. In this way the notion of the bound conscience binds us to one another in much the same way

the explanation to the 8th Commandment calls us to respect one another's opinions and consider them in the best light possible: *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

What does this Mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light." Small Catechism, see Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.1161

12. Are our pastors, under resolution 2 (above) going to be required to perform gay weddings?
 - No, this is not what was approved at the Churchwide Assembly. Our social statement reserves the language of marriage for one man and one woman. No marriage rite was proposed or approved. Under Resolution 2, congregations that choose to do so are allowed to "recognize" publically accountable, life-long, monogamous same-gendered relationships. No blessing of such relationships is mentioned. The notion of "recognition" will be further defined during the fall.
13. What is a "publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gendered relationship?" Where did this come from and what does it mean?
 - This is language developed by the Task Force on Human Sexuality. It is intended to describe the kind of gay or lesbian relationship that this church is prepared to "recognize." Definitions for these terms (like "publicly accountable") are being created this fall for consistent use in the church. These definitions will be part of the Church Council's work and there will be regular reports available through the Lutheran Magazine or by way of the ELCA website, www.elca.org.
14. I believe that homosexual persons have the capacity to change their choices. Don't we have examples from the work of reparative therapy?
 - Reparative therapy has been shown to work for those who express deep dissatisfaction with their sexual orientation and those who are not as deeply defined as homosexual. For those that are constitutionally identified by homosexual orientation reparative therapy can be destructive and unwise. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/06/health/06gay.html> for the recent thinking of the American Psychological Association.
15. I heard that some of these decisions had to pass by a 2/3 margin and others had to pass by a simple majority margin. How was the vote margin determined and why didn't we require a higher percentage on such important decisions?
 - The Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" is a teaching document of this Church. As such, according to the ELCA constitution, it had to pass by a 2/3 vote. As it turned out the proposal did pass by exactly 2/3.
 - The ministry policy recommendations were resolutions to the Assembly. Under Robert's rules such resolutions require only a majority vote. There was considerable debate about whether the Assembly should create a special rule requiring a high standard like a 2/3 vote. After debate the Assembly declined to create a special rule for these resolutions. As it turned out resolution 1 passed by 77%; Resolution 2 passed by 60.6%; Resolution 3 by 55.3%; resolution 4 by 68.5%.
16. It looks like our congregation is moving to some kind of vote on these matters. Is it possible for us to require a 2/3 vote among ourselves?
 - The vote margin is set by the rules you adopt for your meeting. If you would like to have a special rule requiring that the vote be by more than a majority, you would move "to create a special rule." Consult Robert's Rules for the exact language.

17. Is it necessary for us to vote on anything right now?
 - No. No action is required of the congregations. Some of you have asked why we don't have a system like the Presbyterians (PCUSA) that requires major decisions to be ratified by congregations or other local bodies. The answer is that that particular way of doing business is not part of our "polity," the decision-making process adopted by the ELCA. Bishop Hanson has initiated a study of the organization of the ELCA and a Task Force will be making recommendations that could change the way we are organized.
18. The Churchwide Assembly left a lot of flexibility and decision-making in the hands of congregations. Where's the leadership?
 - Ours is not a hierarchical model of church organization. Each expression of the Church (Congregation, Synod, Churchwide) is the leader in areas of ministry most suited to its influence and expertise. The calling of a pastor is a congregational matter set within overall practices of the whole church that tie us together as one Church. Important decisions like whether to recognize a gay union are in the sphere of the congregation's expertise, just like most congregations set wedding policies.
19. Our congregation does not agree with these decisions. How can we express that?
 - First, have conversation among yourselves. You probably have a variety of voices in your congregation and each deserves respect under the 8th Commandment. If you choose to define yourselves in ministry by practices that preserve the pre-Churchwide Assembly position there will be ways to do that. Models will be available. You will continue to be part of the ELCA, standing alongside other congregations that may have decided that, to meet their missional goals, they are open to these decisions. Each congregation is unique and the expert on its own missional needs. Your decisions are your decisions and you will determine how important this is and how long you want the decision to be in effect.
20. Is that really credible? How can we call ourselves ELCA and disagree with these decisions?
 - Luther introduced a good deal of freedom in his understanding of the church. He was also deeply pastoral and flexible in his approach to varied situations. Many of our decisions involve God's influence in the Left-Hand, or civil realm, where God is at work to make the world a safe place. This is the realm of most our decisions about marriage and these understandings don't have to be uniform. In the Right-Hand kingdom God is ushering in the Kingdom of God and this is the place where we have said we are in fellowship with one another if we agree on the preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. This is the heart of our unity in the Gospel. Augsburg Confession VII.
21. We didn't participate very well in the study processes leading up to these decisions. Is that material still available, particularly material on how the scriptures speak to these questions?
 - Yes, you might ask your pastor to find the material or go to the ELCA website, www.elca.org and print in the search box "Journey Together Faithfully Part II." This is the bible study material developed in 2004 for our consideration of the topic of homosexuality. For the truly dedicated there is a more technical essay entitled "Background Essay on Biblical Texts for Journey Together Faithfully, Part II: The Church and Homosexuality" by our theologians Arland Hultgren and Walter Taylor. This essay is available at the ELCA website. Enter "Hultgren and Taylor" in the search box and you will find it.
 - This is an exciting moment for the deepening of our study of scripture. Because we knew these decisions were before us and because we wanted to read scripture in the distinctive way of Lutherans, the effort called "Bible: Book of Faith" was launched in the ELCA. Lots of resources are available through AugsburgFortress (<http://www.bookoffaith.org/default.htm>) and through the ELCA website, www.elca.org. You might also consult your congregation's constitution, section 2, where our understanding of the term "Word of God" is outlined.

22. Is homosexual behavior no longer considered a sin?
- Many believe that what we know today as a naturally-occurring, same-gendered “orientation,” is something that was not known and something not addressed by the classic biblical texts condemning homosexual behavior. The term “homosexual” wasn’t invented until the late 1800’s. The question is whether two mature, fully functioning gay persons should be allowed to put their relationship under life-long promises and be received by the church as sinners with us. We have invited such people with explicit resolutions of welcome for many years. We believe the law and gospel are for them just as they are for the rest of us. If we believe that the context of life-long promises of faithfulness and monogamy is an appropriate action for ELCA members, why shouldn’t otherwise qualified persons preparing for ministry be able to enter into such relationships? Is homosexual conduct a sin? The answer is “not in every case.”
23. Well then, is the authority of the bible being washed away?
- The authority of the bible is in its authority as the Word of God. The ELCA constitution (Chapter 2 and also in your congregation’s constitution) says that Jesus Christ is the Word of God pre-eminent (see John 1:1 and the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus stands in the place of Moses and says, “You have heard that it was said, but I say....”)
 - The Word of God is secondly a two-fold, proclaimed address; by the Law which condemns every human being for failure to keep the Law (the righteous demands of God), and the address of the Gospel which says that because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, satisfaction under the Law has been made. Those who trust this promise are followers of Jesus, himself God’s most complete Word.
 - Third, we say that the Word of God is the canonical scripture, the written Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of our life together. Jesus is the Lord of the scriptures, its central character and complete witness. The bible is the cradle in which Jesus is found. The cradle does not have to be perfect in every respect (bent legs or dirty hay) to convey the perfection of Jesus to us.
 - The authority of the scripture is in its capacity to save. No humanly devised tool like inerrancy or infallibility is needed to protect scripture. It has its own authority. No human action can preserve or destroy this authority. People either acknowledge or ignore this authority that is Jesus for us.
24. Hasn’t the ELCA just caved in to the trendy political correctness of the culture?
- Our discernment has taken years; our bible study is unprecedented. We yearn to be counter-cultural as God’s people but we have been late to recognize many things. For instance, it was said not that long ago that because deaf people could not “hear” the Word of God they could not be saved. We clung to biblical texts about the innate differences between the races. It took culture and the Women’s Movement to press us to see how profound the contribution of women had been to the story of Jesus.
 - Some believe this is a counter-cultural move in a world that largely regards homosexuals as sinners for being homosexual. To the extent that this antipathy is unchallenged by the church the church is enlisted in support of violence against gay children of God. This is the missional edge to these decisions. We follow a promise-making God and our discipleship is in our capacity to make faithful promises that serve the neighbor.
25. We’re probably going to be okay with these decisions but some of our members feel a little embarrassed out in the community, especially when they can’t explain why we did what we did to other Christians. How can we help our members respond?
- One of the best ways to respond would be to equip the members with the study documents we’ve been working from all these years. These materials show the seriousness of our effort

and present the arguments that were influential in our study. In particular those parts of the study that talk about a Lutheran approach to scripture and our notions of authority and the Word of God are rich and important. This approach can be a source of pride in a world where fundamentalisms of many kinds seem to rule the airwaves and give religion a bad name.

26. If we decide we cannot live with these decisions, even though we won't be forced into the practices they approve, how do we go about leaving the ELCA?
 - Please consult your congregation's constitution and the relevant portions of the ELCA Constitution. In short, to leave the ELCA requires a 2/3 vote of the congregation. If this first vote is successful a 90 day "consultation phase" is launched and the Synod bishop must consult with you. After the consultation phase a second vote of 2/3 is necessary to sever the relationship. In most cases the property of the congregation stays with the congregation, particularly if the congregation moves to another Lutheran church body. Consult your constitution for the actual provisions. Please note that it isn't possible for an ELCA congregation to be listed as a member congregation of another church body; that is, there is no provision for "dual rostering" of pastors or congregations.
27. Who are these "other" Lutheran church bodies?
 - There is a list of these other denominations in the ELCA yearbook in your congregation's office or call the synod office and we can mail you this list (509-838-9871). This list includes, among others, the Wisconsin Synod, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and several others.
28. I've heard of LC-MC. Who are they? LC-MC is Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.
 - You can find them with your search engine. These are congregations who left the ELCA and formed a new Lutheran denomination after the struggle of Called to Common Mission in 2002 or so.
29. If we leave the ELCA what happens to our pastor?
 - It depends on the decisions of your pastor. It isn't possible for an ELCA rostered pastor to serve on another Lutheran denomination's roster but the pastor can resign from the ELCA roster and switch to another denomination. Those decisions and standards are set by each denomination. Your pastor's pension is safe and transferable to the new body. The synod office will work with your congregation to address any challenges associated with decisions the pastor has to make if you choose to leave the ELCA. The Synod office will honor and respect your pastor no matter what his or her position is in these matters. We are bound to one another as the Body of Christ and in the promises made at ordination.
30. Where have the church leaders been during all this time? We need leadership!
 - I can only speak for our synod, but I have been consulting with congregations, addressing your pastors, and available for programs on the topic. The Lutheran Magazine has devoted a good deal of space to these issues. The leadership of our church provided for a multi-year study process. If you'd like to know my thinking during the Churchwide Assembly, and how I voted, please read my daily reports on the synod website, www.ewaidsynod.org. Reports from some of our other voting members are available at the same address.
31. Can we know how our voting members voted on these issues?
 - Sure, write to them and ask them or read their reports on the synod website. The votes taken at Churchwide were done by wireless electronic devices so each vote was private.
 - I heard there were problems with the voting machines.
 - During the assembly we quickly got into the practice of shouting for help when we weren't sure our device worked (loss of battery power, etc). During these important votes we accounted for flawed machines. People who were concerned about whether their vote had

been recorded were invited to confirm with the Secretary's office. All votes were accounted for.

- Some have wondered why we didn't take a revote when the margin was so close on the Social Statement. It isn't the usual practice to revote unless a problem is detected. A motion "to reconsider" was moved but since this motion has to be made by someone who voted on the prevailing side, it was ruled out of order under Robert's rules.
32. What is the impact of these decisions on our Lutheran church partners in other parts of the world and on our ecumenical relationships?
- Our Churchwide employees who have responsibility for these relationships are in contact with our partner churches in the Lutheran World Federation and other organizations. That conversation is on-going and we may not know the impact of the decisions for some years. Some Lutheran church bodies have addressed the situation and you should check the website of those bodies to find the response they may have offered. Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, did address the Assembly and his comments can be found at: <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Communication-Services/News/Releases.aspx?a=4272>
33. Who is Lutheran Core and Lutherans Concerned?
- These are advocacy groups that sought to influence the decisions of the church. Look them up on the Web to learn more about them. See www.lutherancore.org and www.lcna.org.
34. What's going to be the impact of these decisions on our Sunday School materials and on our camps, colleges, and universities?
- If the organizations are separately organized they will make their own decisions about the impact of these decisions. A camp, for instance, may want to act through its Board to determine a response, if any. We are not a top-down, heavily centralized church and there is a good deal of freedom exercised especially among affiliated organizations.
 - Augsburg Fortress publishing house is not printing new materials because of these decisions. In any case, the congregation determines which curriculum is most suitable for its needs. Since Luther's time we have entrusted much of this teaching to families, the "first church" for most of us.
35. Where is the argument made for these decisions?
- The arguments on both sides of these issues have been presented in the study materials. All of these materials are still available for your use at www.elca.org/journeyfaithfully or in your pastor's files.
36. What avenues of protest do we have available to us other than adopting one of the statements that defines our ministry as traditional? For instance, can we withhold or redirect our mission support (benevolence)?
- Here are some questions I ask you to consider before considering withholding or redirection:
- As you think about redirecting mission support dollars as a protest against the Assembly action, who will be helped and who will be hurt by this decision?
 - Is this likely outcome consistent with your intention?
 - Explain the understandings of "church" and "stewardship" that are expressed and modeled by this choice.
 - If members of your own congregation follow this example, what would be the likely impact on your local mission as a congregation?
 - With these things in mind, who would be helped and who would be hurt by this choice?
 - Is there a better way to accomplish what you're trying to do?
- [Thanks to Bishop Wayne Miller for these questions]

- Withholding or redirecting is a very unhelpful tool for protest. So many other ministries are affected as well as the faithful employees of our Church. It would be like using a sledgehammer to kill a fly. If you choose to go this way I hope you will try to be as pointed and precise as possible. For instance, I don't think most congregations want our missionaries brought home because of protests over human sexuality. These decisions are a minute part of the organizational ministry of this Church.
 - In the case where such decisions are made as a way to "punish" the Church, it has to be said that this is an attack on the whole Body of Christ and is directly contrary to the whole spirit and ministry of Jesus the reconciler. We have been declared one Body and then covenanted our lives together as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12). We owe one another a hearing and respect when we disagree (see the explanation to the eighth commandment, above).
37. It seems like these decisions favor the young over older members and U.S. Lutherans over Lutherans in other countries and cultures. Does the ELCA favor some neighbors more than others?
- We're all the ELCA so the question is a good one for each of us to consider. The book is "Who Stole My Church: What to do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century." (Thomas Nelson, 2008), reviewed in Lutheran Partners, September/October 2009. The reviewer suggests this may be a good "resource to begin conversation among members who feel forgotten in this ever-evolving time."
 - I wonder if this thinking is reflective of the cultural pressures that are pitting young against old around questions of support for Medicare and health reform.
 - If we are an evangelical church, called to spread a public word of hope in Jesus Christ, that word addresses those not in our churches. To spread this word has been the consistent focus of the church since the very beginning. Is this in competition with those saints who have been church with us for many years? Paul argues in 1 Cor 8 that the established believers, those who have knowledge of their freedom in Christ, nevertheless have an obligation not to scandalize those younger (weaker) in the faith. How do we lay down our "right to be right?"
 - We all rue the day when such feelings of being left behind or ignored are real in our congregations. The call to each of us is to incorporate the whole body, all the gifts, and leave no one behind.
38. I don't favor these decisions and I feel like I've been accused of not "loving my neighbor."
- These decisions have been presented for conversation under the careful acknowledgement that we are not, as a church, in agreement with one another. We have committed ourselves to "bearing the burden" of one another's disagreement. There is to be respect for each member who struggled with scripture.
 - The Task Force on Human Sexuality considered many options, including maintaining the historic understanding of homosexuality. Their conclusion was, for better or worse, that we are not likely to return to the old consensus that homosexual conduct is always sin (and the earlier consensus that to be homosexual was always sinful.) It was also the conclusion of the Task Force that we did not agree on a new consensus that would set new expectations. The intermediate position is that we must live with this tension for the time-being and wait for the Holy Spirit to lead us again.
 - So we have two positions that we're trying to hold in place, not forcing either side to relent. Among those persons and congregations where, for missional reasons, the new consensus around a notion of naturally occurring homosexuality is present, these decisions give them the freedom to move into that new reality and call pastors who have made life-long promises of fidelity. Those who are constrained by conscientious doubts will not be asked to receive this new consensus, but will be respected for faithful ministry under our old assumptions.

This way of “loving the neighbor” will be respected. Perhaps the key question is whether we are able to live alongside one another in this tension. Can we all fit under this tent?

- For me this is a tension that we see in the human body every time we try to take a step forward or back. In trying to walk two forces must be balanced with one another, a braking force and a propelling force. The toes move to push us forward and the heel balances the movement by offering a brake. Are we only propelling or only braking? “...as it is God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

How shall we turn to one another, in our differences, and say “I have need of you.”

“Now, you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” (1Cor 12)

39. Won't the church be sued by those who will argue that the church is discriminatory against gay pastors?

- No. First Amendment law has been a shield for churches who must be allowed, in their religious freedom, to set standards for their pastors without interference from US labor law. Rep Barney Frank is one introducing new legislation (Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 2009 (H.R. 2981) to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, but even his legislation includes an explicit religious exception. Quoting from Church Law and Tax Report, September/October 2009, p. 16: “This Act shall not apply to a corporation, association, educational institution, or society that is exempt from the religious discrimination provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964....” All that being said, it still is the case that if you can find a lawyer to craft a cause of action any of us can be sued, anytime.

Finally:

I know we all yearn for that day when our Lord returns and explains why this life has to be so hard and so full of difficult decisions! Perfection is not an option for people who describe themselves as Lutherans, saints who are also sinners, slaves who are also free, but we have been invited to risk everything for the mission of Christ and it is our church's wisdom that we should align ourselves with those on the outside, the marginalized and detested.

I have asked our congregations to take time this fall to reflect on the decisions made and to study what might have been overlooked before. I ask our congregations to fund their budgets until other decisions might be made together in prayer and conversation. I ask our members not to punish the local congregation by withholding contributions. After congregations have had a chance to consult and reflect, new budget decisions can be made at the annual meeting but it is only fair to give your church a chance to prepare for such decisions. You might consider inviting in a member of the Synod Council for conversation and additional perspective on the ministry of your church beyond your parish area.

I hope this question and answer format has been helpful to you. If you have further questions you can contact me at the e-mail address at the beginning of this document. I regard this as the beginning of a conversation, thoughtful dialogue among members of the Church who seek the best for the church and for our neighbors. If you would like to know more about what the Churchwide Assembly felt like please see my daily reports, filed at www.ewaidsynod.org.