



# Western Iowa Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

September 4, 2009

## **To the Congregations in the Western Iowa Synod:**

*Grace and Peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

You have all been in my prayers as I can imagine that there have been many questions since the church-wide assembly about “What does this mean” regarding recent churchwide assembly actions concerning policy implementations around rostered service for those who are or desire to be in a same-gender, monogamous, accountable relationship.

I want to make clear that life in the synod continues to be centered on engaging the mission of this church, through the telling of the old, old story of Jesus and his love with an eye to missional service.

As I write, there are no pastors or prospective pastors in the Western Iowa Synod who are not in compliance with *Vision and Expectations*. Furthermore, in eight years as bishop there has been no one not in compliance with *Vision and Expectations* who has served on this roster. There will be no immediate policy change to *Vision and Expectations* as any change will likely be a year or more in the making.

Unless a congregation requests consideration of a pastor in a same-gender, monogamous, accountable relationship, all other candidates who indicate that they are homosexual will be expected to be celibate.

In the Western Iowa Synod there has never been a request from any congregation for a non-celibate gay pastoral candidate, nor has there been any candidate ever offered for consideration for call in this synod who was not in compliance with *Vision and Expectations*. And finally, it is the congregation, not the synod, that extends the call. It remains the congregation’s responsibility to determine which candidate best suits the context of their ministry setting. This church is committed to honoring the bound conscience of bishop, pastor, or congregation on this matter.

And so, I urge you to remain steadfast in your kingdom service in this synod and church and to celebrate the mission we hold together:

- With Tanzanian guests present, a week ago we held the dedication of the well-drilling rig and truck to pull it. As a result, hundreds of thousands of lives will be saved by your efforts to provide clean, safe water.
- Last Sunday, one hundred eighty donors gathered at the Clay County Regional Events Center for an evening of stories, music, a meal and fund raising. \$230,000 was committed in pledges for the Center for Agricultural Development in Tanzania.
- Lay School of Ministry begins afresh this fall with nearly two hundred participants who have completed or are now taking courses.
- Twelve congregations of this synod are in some form of shared ministry formation.
- We anticipate a record number of participants in the Tri-synodical Fall Conference for rostered leaders.

The real challenge is to energize people for faithful service in Christ's name; to bear witness to the unconditional love of Christ who offered himself so completely and fully. May the decision around sexuality at the churchwide assembly not define us. Rather, let us be known not as a people who talk a good story, but lag in zeal, but rather as a people who in spite of conscience bound differences demonstrate that the main thing – proclaiming the love of Christ – is still the main thing. That our unity is built not on single issue concerns but on Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Finally, the following opportunities will be available to consider “What does this mean?” follow-up conversation with the bishop or bishop's staff:

- Tri-synodical Fall Conference (for rostered leaders)
- 12 Bishop's Conference Events scheduled around the synod
- Colloquy for Conference Chaplains and Deans
- Synod staff available to meet with individual congregations

Your Partner in Ministry,

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+Bishop Michael A. Last