

## 2010 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly

### A – Faithfulness in Decision-Making

Source: The Rev. Ronald F. Marshall, First Lutheran Church of West Seattle

WHEREAS the beliefs and practices of the ELCA express the historic doctrinal consensus of the Church normed by the authority of the Bible, the Gospel, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions, as expressed in Chapter 2 of the ELCA Constitution; and

WHEREAS in Chapter 3 of its Constitution, the ELCA declares that “The church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and service” (3.02); and

WHEREAS the ELCA Constitution states that this church shall “Assure faithfulness to this church’s confessional position and purpose and provide for resolution of disputes” (4.03.j); and

WHEREAS “The congregations, synods, and Churchwide organization shall act in accordance with the Confession of Faith set forth in Chapter 2 of this constitution and with the Statement of Purpose set forth in Chapter 4; (5.01.a); and

WHEREAS the ongoing determination of this church’s doctrinal beliefs and practices under ever new conditions of historical experience has customarily required a two-thirds vote of a Churchwide legislative assembly (e.g., adoption of the ELCA statement on ecumenism in 1991; adoption of new ministry patterns for the ELCA in 1993; adoption of any social statement of the ELCA; affirmation in 1997 of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Roman Catholic Church; adoption of full-communion agreements with the Reformed Churches in 1997, the Episcopal Church and the Moravian Church [Northern and Southern Provinces] in 1999, and the United Methodist Church in 2009; and approval of any amendments to the constitutional provisions or bylaws of the ELCA); and

WHEREAS ELCA social statements requiring a two-thirds vote at the Churchwide Assembly often express a highly significant restatement and reinterpretation of doctrine as, for example, openness to same-sex partnerships (p. 11) in the Social Statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” adopted in August 2009; and

WHEREAS the “Resolutions on Ministry Policies” (August 2009 Churchwide Assembly) granting congregations individually the authority to recognize same-gender partnerships and to call into ordained ministry persons in such partnerships are, in fact, highly significant as well as highly controversial issues of doctrinal belief and practice deserving the consensus of at least a two-thirds majority of a Churchwide Assembly;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Northwest Washington Synod memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to take the following actions:

- a. Affirm that ‘publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender’ partnerships, and ordination of such partnered persons, are not policy issues only but doctrinal issues of high significance, which in fidelity to the ELCA Constitution’s “Confession of Faith” (Chapter 2) and “Nature of the Church” (Chapter 3), and for the well-being of this church, should receive at least a two-thirds approval by a Churchwide Assembly.
- b. Authorize a study to produce clear conclusions and recommendations regarding same-gender partnerships and the ordination of such partnered persons (including gender roles and their possible exceptions, appropriate forms of sexual intimacy, an identifying name for same-gender partnership and a sample rite solemnizing the same), with such a study to give due examination of doctrinal ramifications (e.g., teachings on biblical authority, sin and grace, marriage and the sexes, ecclesial authority, etc.); and also attention to the teachings of other Christian churches, such as those in the Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic Church and churches with whom we have full communion.
- c. Grant interim and provisional status in the ELCA to the approval of same-gender partnerships and ordinations of such partnered persons, as passed by the August 2009 Churchwide Assembly (“Resolutions on Ministry Policies”), until such time that these issues are approved by at least a two-thirds majority at a Churchwide Assembly.
- d. Direct the Church Council to propose a constitutional amendment to the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA that will provide consistently for a two-thirds approval of matters that are clearly doctrinal in nature, even if such issues are not highly controversial. The language should clearly recognize that attention to the *sensus fidelium* – “the sense of the faithful” – and corporate and honest decision-making, are vital for the ongoing task of stating and restating our beliefs and practices in the one Body of Christ.

**Implications of Resolution (if adopted):**

1. What is the financial impact of this resolution on the synod budget?

None

2. What are the personnel implications within our synod (or churchwide)? Who will be responsible for implementation of the resolution?

None

3. How does this resolution enhance and forward the mission of the church and our synod?

This resolution would provide consistent two-thirds approval by a Churchwide Assembly of all matters that are clearly doctrinal in nature.