

April/May 2007

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Chapter Contact Information & Meetings

Phoenix Chapter *lcphoenix@lcna.org* or 602-870-3611 or P.O. Box 7519, Phoenix, AZ 85011

No chapter meetings currently scheduled.

Valley of the Sun Chapter *ric@lcvalleyofthesun.org* or P.O. Box 751, Litchfield Park, AZ 85340

Contact chapter leadership regarding possible meetings.

Tucson Chapter *lctucson@lcna.org* or *www.lctucson.org* or 520-722-8820 or
7014 Golf Links Rd., PMB 212, Tucson, AZ 85730

April 15 (Sunday), 6:30 PM – contact chapter leadership for location and program.

May 20 (Sunday), 6:30 PM – contact chapter leadership for location and program.

Paso del Norte Chapter *lcpasodelnorte@lcna.org* or 915-751-9046 or 222 Alan-a-Dale, El Paso, TX 79924

Contact chapter leadership regarding possible meetings.

Sangre de Cristo Chapter *lcsangredecristo@lcna.org* or 505-983-9461 or
1701 Arroyo Chamiso, Santa Fe, NM 87505

Contact chapter leadership regarding possible meetings.

LC/NA Core Team Training in Berkeley, CA, April 13-14

In an ongoing series of Lutherans Concerned Core Team trainings being held at locations across North America, the next one will be conducted at the ELCA’s Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, on April 13 and 14 (Friday and Saturday). The training is being led by LC/NA Executive Director **Emily Eastwood**. These events are designed to enable participants to better articulate their faith and beliefs and then to return home and form teams to promote the Reconciling in Christ program in their own congregations and synods. The training is an empowering and exhilarating experience and anyone interested in advocating for LGBT equality within the church – whether Lutheran or not – is encouraged to register and participate.

Cost of the training, including all meals and materials, is **\$85**, with housing and transportation extra. Further details may be obtained or registration completed online using a credit card at *www.lcna.org*. And for those wishing to request locally hosted housing or needing scholarship assistance, please contact **Jerry Vagts** for possible availability (651-665-0861 or email *grassroots@lcna.org*). The deadline for registration for this event is **Saturday, April 7**, so get in touch with LC/NA right away if you wish to participate!

Interested in participating but not able to commit to this session due to timing or location? Check the LC/NA web site (*www.lcna.org*) for other event dates and locations in the months ahead. There is already information provided on the site for another training session scheduled for May 17-20 in Newton, Massachusetts. These sessions are a great investment of both time and resources in order to be better able to discuss your faith and make connections with like-minded individuals across the continent!

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Hearing Panel Votes for August Removal of Pastor Schmeling Also Highlights Seeming Conflict of Various ELCA Standards

A Discipline Hearing Committee appointed primarily by the ELCA hierarchy – both national and synodical – conducted a five day hearing in January to consider charges filed against Bradley Schmeling, pastor since 2000 of St. John's Lutheran Church in Atlanta. The charges were filed by Southeastern Synod Bishop Ronald Warren following Schmeling's statement that he was in a committed same gender relationship with another man. That acknowledgement put Schmeling's conduct in violation of a guideline contained in *Vision and Expectations*, a document adopted by the ELCA in 1990 which provides expectations for conduct by clergy within the church. An additional document, *Definitions and Guidelines*, outlines the grounds on which a pastor may be subjected to discipline. However, Schmeling's contention was that both documents contain language incompatible with the ELCA Constitution and Bylaws and should therefore be ignored in considering his situation and relationship.

In its decision announced February 7, a bare majority (7 of 12) of the committee members felt they had no option but to vote to remove Schmeling from the ELCA Clergy Roster. However, they set an effective date of August 15 which places it after the conclusion of the ELCA 2007 Churchwide Assembly scheduled earlier in August in Chicago. But more notably and significantly, they "suggested" synods memorialize this Churchwide Assembly to "reconsider and revise" language in both *Definitions and Guidelines* and *Vision and Expectations* which preclude "practicing homosexuals" from service as pastors in the church. They also called for a policy revision to "permit persons who have resigned or have been removed from the rosters of this church solely because they have entered into a loving, lifelong partnership with another person of the same sex that is mutual, chaste and faithful, to apply for reinstatement immediately", rather than having to wait five years as is currently required.

Consequently, LC/NA and other organizations seeking to ensure equality for LGBT pastors and other rostered church professionals who are in same gender relationships immediately drew up and distributed resolution templates for congregations to use in their own individual synods. While the results of this push for memorial resolutions in synods across the country is not yet known, congregations and individuals in the Phoenix, Tucson, El Paso/Las Cruces and Santa Fe/Albuquerque areas have responded. In most synods, the deadlines this year for submitting resolutions in advance have already passed (the Rocky Mountain Synod Assembly is May 17-19 and the Grand Canyon Synod meets June 7-9). However, voting members will still be able to introduce resolutions from the floor of synod assemblies, so even where the timeline was too compressed to permit congregations to submit such resolutions in advance, other synods may yet have the opportunity to consider these resolutions. (*See the article by George Watson which begins on page 3 of this newsletter for more information on the importance of this action.*)

Memberships & Contributions Always Welcomed!

LC/NA and the local chapters of our organization are always in need of contributions to help fund our work. If you are not a member and would like to join, visit the LC/NA web site (www.lcna.org) and use a credit card to make your payment. Or if you prefer, print a membership form and mail it together with a check. Suggested rates begin at \$50 for individuals, with a wide range of other contribution levels offered.

Note that if you wish a portion of your membership dollars to be shared with a local chapter, you must indicate that chapter name in the appropriate section on the form. Thanks for your support of our ministries!

Looking for an Article or Information from a Back Issue?

Go to www.lctucson.org, select "LC/Phoenix" in the top right corner of the screen and then highlight "LC/Phoenix Newsletters". A dropdown menu will display dates of all issues since June/July 2005, or select "LC/Phoenix Archives" to access issues back to December 2003/January 2004. Then just click on the issue you are looking for.

Thanks to Gregory Swanson and the LC/Tucson Chapter for providing this resource!

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The Schmeling Decision – What Now? by George Watson

When the Discipline Hearing Committee issued its decision, the initial reaction of many was huge disappointment at the ruling that Pastor Schmeling would be removed from the ELCA Clergy Roster in August. But upon further study and reflection it became clear to our supporters and to the opposition just what a momentous opinion the Committee had written. (*The full text of the decision is available on the LC/NA web site www.lcna.org, on the St. John's Lutheran Church web site www.stjohnsatlanta.org and elsewhere – Ed.*)

The Committee really “got it” – or at least most of them did. The outstanding skills of Pastor Schmeling and the wonderful ministry taking place at St. John's in Atlanta convinced the committee that the present policy is “at least bad policy and may very well violate the constitution and bylaws of this church.” It is too bad, though understandable, that the Committee felt it could not rule on the constitutionality issue. They instead left that to the Committee on Appeals, which has the authority to rule on the constitutionality of the policy. It is expected that Pastor Schmeling will request that this happen. (*Both Pastor Schmeling and Bishop Warren have now subsequently appealed the decision of the Hearing Committee – Ed.*)

The Committee on Appeals will not conduct a new hearing. It will rely on the transcript of the Discipline Hearing Committee, the evidence submitted in Atlanta and the briefs and written arguments that will be submitted by each side.

The Discipline Hearing Committee chose not to rely on the hope that the Committee on Appeals would rule that the present policy is unconstitutional. They took the extraordinary and unprecedented step of calling on synods to memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to change the policy.

There have been many prior attempts at Churchwide Assemblies to change this policy. These attempts have mostly been ruled out of order. It is crucial at this juncture to understand *why*, so that this time, at least, the issue can be brought before the Assembly properly. To do that it is important to understand how the policy came to be.

Vision and Expectations is a document that was developed by the Division for Ministry (now called the Unit for Vocation and Education), in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and then approved by the Church Council. It describes what the church expects of its ordained pastors. It contains one sentence that pertains to pastors who are homosexual: “Ordained and commissioned ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.” Changes to that document must travel the same route by which it originally became ELCA policy; that is, any proposed change must be developed by the (now) Unit for Vocation and Education, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and then be approved by the Church Council. What role can the Churchwide Assembly play in this? The Churchwide Assembly could vote to request or direct that the Unit for Vocation and Education, the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council process such an amendment.

Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline, according to the ELCA Constitution, was developed by the Committee on Appeals and approved by the Church Council. This document also contains a sentence that pertains to pastors who are homosexual: “Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church.” As with *Vision and Expectations*, synods can memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to request and direct that the Committee on Appeals and the Church Council initiate the process for its amendment.

It is, therefore, vitally important for as many synods as possible to pass such memorials. Templates have been developed and are available at the Goodsoil website (www.goodsoil.org). The process could be done independently of the Churchwide Assembly, but it is, unfortunately, the history of this church that it moves only after it is clear that its movement will be supported by a strong majority of its members. It has rarely chosen to take a prophetic stance on internal matters.

It is not absolutely necessary that the action be initiated at the Churchwide Assembly. The Church Council has the authority to initiate the process, requesting that the appropriate units prepare the necessary amendments. Undoubtedly, if all sixty-five synods sent such a request to the Church Council, it would happen. It could happen with fewer than sixty-five, but how many would be necessary is anyone's guess. Nevertheless, it would also be very important for as many Synod Councils as possible to make such a request to the Church Council. Synod Councils speak to the Church Council, Synod Assemblies speak to the Churchwide Assembly.

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Having said this, it must be mentioned that there is a way for the Churchwide Assembly to act directly to change this policy. As it stands now, the Churchwide Assembly cannot act directly because the policies or documents are not ones that have been approved or “owned” by the Assembly. But it is possible for the Assembly to vote to take ownership of the relevant documents. Such action would essentially make the documents equivalent to bylaws, changeable only by Assembly action. Such action would have no parallel in our church and would have serious implications for the multitude of policies and procedures used in the ELCA.

So then, where do we go from here? In addition to working toward changing the policy by sending synod memorials to the Churchwide Assembly and pushing Synod Councils to forward requests to the Church Council to make changes, there is yet one other possibility. When you look at the templates referenced earlier, you will see a third suggestion – “Endorsing Restraint”. Adoption of this proposal would send a message that, while a synod might not be ready for a total change in current policy, it might be willing to give space and discretion to Bishops to deal with situations such as Pastor Schmeling’s in ways other than removal from the roster.

One thing is clear; we cannot sit back and catch our breath. We need to press for change at every turn. We must also support those who are in a position to effect change and give congregations such as St. John’s, Atlanta, and Pastor Schmeling space to do the ministry to which they have been called.

George Watson is a member of St. Martin Lutheran Church, Port Huron, Michigan, where he has served as Vice-President, chair of the Worship and Music Committee and Board Member of the Mid-City Nutrition Program. He served as Secretary of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the ELCA for sixteen years. He is a member of the Board of The Network for Inclusive Vision. He is Attorney at Law for Touma, Watson, Whaling, Coury & Castello, whose practice is limited to Real Estate and Estate Planning. He is the past President, of the Port Huron Rotary Club, past President of the St. Clair County Bar Association, and a member of the Board of Directors of Port Huron Hospital Foundation. He is also a gourmet cook and his email address is GeorgeCWatson@compuserve.com. This article first appeared in The Network Letter, issue 1, Lent 2007, and is reprinted with permission, although it carries a disclaimer that it “may be reproduced without permission” (web site www.inclusivenet.com).

Lutheran Houses of Worship and Welcome

The following congregations in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Western Texas and Southern Nevada have adopted “Reconciling in Christ” (RIC) statements. Please support these churches who welcome and include sexual minorities as full participants in their worship life and activities! All congregations and organizations are encouraged to publicize their statements on a continuing basis to remind members and visitors of that welcome.

If you, your congregation or an organization such as a Lutheran Campus Ministry would like further information on the program, visit the LC/NA web site (www.lcna.org). If you have questions or would like to have a conversation about the program, contact LC/NA Executive Director **Emily Eastwood** (email exec@lcna.org), LC/NA Grassroots Organizing Coordinator **Jerry Vagts** (grassroots@lcna.org), the Southwest Regional Coordinator (now including the states of AZ, CA, CO, HI, NM, NV, UT, WY & West TX – rcsouthwest@lcna.org) or any chapter.

Faith Lutheran Church	801 E. Camelback Road	Phoenix, AZ	85014	602-265-3394
Bethel Lutheran Church	7320 N. 27 th Avenue	Phoenix, AZ	85051	602-995-0629
University Lutheran Church	340 E. 15 th Street	Tempe, AZ	85281	480-967-3543
Lutheran Church of the Foothills	5102 N. Craycroft Road	Tucson, AZ	85718	520-299-5631
Santa Cruz Lutheran Church	6809 S. Cardinal	Tucson, AZ	85746	520-883-2937
St. Paul Lutheran Church	1100 Indian School, NE	Albuquerque, NM	87102	505-242-5942
Christ Lutheran Church	1701 Arroyo Chamiso	Santa Fe, NM	87505	505-983-9461
Peace Lutheran Church	1701 E. Missouri	Las Cruces, NM	88001	505-522-7119
St. Timothy Lutheran Church	11050 Montwood Drive	El Paso, TX	79936	915-598-2621
Mount Tabor Lutheran Church	175 S. 700 E.	Salt Lake City, UT	84102	801-328-0521
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church	2045 N. 800 E.	North Logan, UT	84341	801-752-7753

The ELCA Grand Canyon Synod and Rocky Mountain Synod are also rostered by LC/NA as RIC bodies.

Thanks to Faith Lutheran (Phoenix) for Copying this Newsletter once again!

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