At the Churchwide Assembly in August, an old acquaintance and former pastor in this Synod, Rev. John Carrier, gave me his business card as he serves in his current work, campus ministry in Winona, Minnesota. On the card was the famous “Serenity Prayer.” I have long known this prayer but had no idea that it was originally a much longer prayer.

I have prayed this extended prayer on a number of occasions over the past six weeks. I pray it now with you:

“God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference; living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen.”

-Reinhold Niebuhr

***************
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In the midst of the decisions surrounding sexuality made at our 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Here are a few of the questions that have been asked of me in the last weeks:

So, how are we doing in this Synod about these decisions?

It is a mixed bag! I have on my desk many letters from individuals with great concerns. Our convocation of rostered leaders on September 1 was the best attended of any of the ones we have had in twenty years. The event for lay people held on September 21 brought one hundred people together from twenty-four congregations. There is interest, passion and anxiety. Some pastors report considerable questions. Others report “all quiet.” There have been a few congregational open meetings in our Synod to discuss the decisions. I am sure there is more of all of this to come.

And, how are you doing, Bishop?

The work of interpretation of these decisions adds to the already heavy burdens placed on your Synod staff. Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege and I have been visiting congregations all over this Synod this fall dealing with vacancies, stewardship, evangelism and candidacy. We recognize that the sexuality decisions are forcing us to add a number of meetings and appointments. We welcome your congregational invitation to discuss these or any other matters. Please, however, have patience with our schedules.

What is the biblical support cited by those who have advocated change in our ELCA ministry policies regarding homosexuality?

It is best to have the advocates of change speak for themselves. Within this newsletter I have enclosed a four-page essay by Dr. Timothy Wengert. Pastor Wengert teaches at our Philadelphia seminary and was a member of the Sexuality Task Force. His paper is the best biblical affirming witness to these changes in policy I have yet seen.
How can a person who does not agree with the Churchwide Assembly’s decisions continue to be a part of the ELCA?

I plan to stay and continue my work as a Bishop and a minister of Word and Sacrament. My responsibility is to proclaim the Word of God, to testify to the good news of Jesus Christ and to be this Synod’s pastor. As long as I am able to proclaim Christ within this Church, and to honestly share my thinking on these and other matters of faith and ethics, I can proudly serve here. I am convinced that God has called me to this witness. Our Church body has an exciting mission to serve God's world. We are all sinful, frail and make mistakes, yet God renews us in this Church.

What next?

We continue to talk to each other and we pray for guidance, patience and a loving heart. God will prevail.

TRANSITIONS

+Faith, White Pine, ends its ministry as a congregation on Sunday, October 18, 2009 with a festive worship service of thanksgiving. We will honor the congregation, its mission, history and vision at the 2010 Synod Assembly.

+Community Lutheran Church in Palmer is the new name of the consolidated congregation as Concordia and Palmer and Our Saviour in Suomi Location become one congregation. They will celebrate their merger on Friday, October 23, 2009, and will be received at the 2010 Synod Assembly as a new congregation of our Synod.

+Congratulations to Graduate Seminarian Judy Mai who has been called to Immanuel in Escanaba. Her ordination and installation will be Saturday, October 24, 2009. We welcome Pastor-Elect Judy Mai to this work. Her spouse, Paul, is the pastor at Bethany in Escanaba. Welcome!
God bless Graduate Seminarian Michael Mannisto and his wife, Michelle, as he is ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament on Saturday, October 17, 2009 and his installation at St. James in Rudyard on Reformation Sunday, October 25, 2009. Thanks be to God!

Pastor George Candea-Kromm was installed as pastor of Grace in Gwinn on Sunday, September 20, 2009. We welcome him and his wife, Shirley, to our Synod. God is at work in our Church as another servant of God begins his work in our Synod.

Graduate Seminarian Chanjwok Nyikako was ordained on Sunday, September 20, 2009 in Chicago. He will serve First in Ewen, Our Saviour in Paynesville and Trinity in Trout Creek. Pastor Nyikako comes to us from the Sudan in Africa. He has studied in Russia and our seminary in Chicago. God bless his ministry in our midst!

Thomas A. Skrenes, Bishop

A SACRED TRUST:
Keeping the Church a Safe and Sacred Place for All

October 12, 2009
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Marquette, MI
Eastern Time Zone

October 13, 2009
Calvary Lutheran Church
Minocqua, WI
Central Time Zone

Registration forms for these events are available online at www.nglsynod.org

STUBBING YOUR TAX TOE
A Tax Information Workshop for Clergy & Church Treasurers

November 5, 2009
Messiah Lutheran Church
Marquette, MI
9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. ET
$10 per person (includes lunch)
THANK YOU

Lay School for Mission
Trinity, Rapid River
Holy Cross, Baraga

Lutheran World Relief
Gloria Dei, Hancock
Grace, South Range
Trinity, Rhinelander
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Calvary, Rapid River
Holy Trinity, Chassell

World Missionary Support
Trinity, Stambaugh
Calvary, Rapid River

ELCA Disaster Funds
Grace, South Range

Sabbath Project
Emmanuel, Menominee

Lutheran Campus Ministry
Emanuel, Skandia
Calvary, Rapid River
Grace, Gwinn
Bethany, Amasa

Seminarian Support
Faith, Rock
Grace, Gwinn
Bethany, Amasa

Endowment Fund
First, Iron Mountain

Kisarawe
Holy Trinity, Chassell
Rev. Robert & Deloris Langseth

Answer the Call
Patricia Robichaud
Rev. Devon & JoAnne Barrix

Malaria Net Project
St. Paul’s, Mass City

Tanzania
Christ Lutheran Parish, Ironwood
It was a stunning late summer Tuesday afternoon. A certain college student was riding her bike back to her apartment after her last class of the day. Mid-way home, she was struck by a car. The force of the crash mangled both her and the bike. It didn’t look good.

A woman walking along the sidewalk observed this crash, the fall, and the obviously hurt biker who was moaning softly beside what looked to be a very new pearl white car now with a pretty good sized indentation and even a bit of blood smudged on the passenger side door. In a nanosecond the sidewalk woman was at the biker’s side. She was not a nurse. She was not a doctor. She was not an off duty EMT who just happened to be in the area. She was a thirty-something woman with a husband and children walking home from work when the accident happened. She ran to the woman and began to pray aloud with and for the biker.

As another used his cell phone to call 911 – she prayed aloud. As others assessed the tangled mess of biker and bike and, by consensus, decided to move nothing – she prayed aloud. As several kind hearted individuals asked the biker how she was doing, and with compassion assured her that an ambulance was on the way – she prayed quietly aloud. As the EMTs arrived and began to do their work – she prayed quietly aloud. Once the biker asked the prayer to pray that she be allowed to live. As the EMTs carefully untangled the biker, straightened her body out, and lifted it on to the gurney - she quietly prayed aloud. As the EMTs gently lifted the biker into the ambulance - so, too, did this woman climb into the ambulance as she continued to pray. In the ER, she was at the biker’s side – softly, almost inaudibly, she prayed aloud.

Once all was said and done, that biker with her numerous cuts, bruises, pulled muscles, and a totally destroyed i-pod walked out of the ER, hugged and thanked her praying friend, and stepped inside the car that would take her home - quietly praying prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving.

I suspect that many of us have lifted up a quick petition for injured people we slowly drive past at the scene of an accident. But I wonder how many other opportunities we simply miss to pray for or with someone else because we have not the spiritual eyes or the willingness to see the signs around us that call us to prayer.

Open our eyes, Lord, that we may see you at work healing and blessing the world.
Open our ears, Lord, that we may hear you calling us to prayer.

Blessings!
Pastoral Vacancies and Interim Pastors

Bethany, Perkins - Pastor Peter Andersen
Concordia, Palmer & Our Saviour’s, Negaunee - Pastor Virginia Eggert
Holy Trinity, Chassell - Pastors Jimalee Jones & Peter Gundersen
Zion, St. Ignace & Trinity, Brevort - Pastor George Kaiser
Emanuel, Skandia - Pastor James Duehring
Prince of Peace, Eagle River - Pastor Bill Hayes
Eden, Munising - Pastor Eleanor Russey
Siloa, Ontonagon - Pastor John West
Christ the King, Escanaba - Pastor Len Gilley
Trinity, Stonington - Pastor Stephen Gauger

Following our lowest July mission support giving since 1990, August giving was at its highest level on record. Calendar year giving as of August 31 is $5,793 below 2008, while fiscal year receipts are $1,836 above FY2008. Designated gifts are down by 14%, including $10,975 less in World Hunger Appeal receipts. As we enter the fall, may we trust in the Lord’s extravagant goodness to us, and share God’s blessings that the work of the wider Church may be sustained.

Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As of August 31</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>$ Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pledged Amount</td>
<td>1,032,591</td>
<td>1,005,571</td>
<td>-27,020</td>
<td>-2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount Received</td>
<td>597,779</td>
<td>591,986</td>
<td>-5,793</td>
<td>-.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated Gifts</td>
<td>127,096</td>
<td>109,189</td>
<td>-17,907</td>
<td>-.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ON-LINE DEVOTIONS FOR OCTOBER 2009

www.prayfaithfully.org

October 4-10 / Gisele Duehring, Prince of Peace, Marquette
October 11-17 / Kelly Ylitalo
October 18-24 / 
October 25-31 / Pastor Peter Vorhes, Faith, Calumet
HOW GOOD ARE YOU AT MATH?

This must be done in your head only. Do not use paper or pencil or a calculator. Promise?! No cheating!!!

You have 1000 and you add 40 to it…. Now add another 1000…. Now add 30….. Add another 1000….Now add 20…Now add another 1000…. And now add 10.

What is your total? Be honest now. The correct answer is buried in the list of Conference Coaches below. The “Coach” in your conference has chosen because they understand that our church is dependent on trained leaders. And the pastor that stands before you each Sunday and the pastor in your congregation that serves you in so many ways is there because he or she “answered a call.” And they know and understand the math. It takes time, talent and money to prepare for a career as a parish pastor. And the day is long gone when the church picked up the entire cost.

The “coaches” also know we will have fewer and fewer to be called to your parish if the number of anticipated retirees exceeds the number of graduates the next few years. They will tell you there could be 30% less. And this number is not imagined!

The “coaches” listed below are not only good at math but they are ready to encourage and help you prepare for a special Sunday to grow the seminarian scholarship endowment fund. They have bulletin inserts and other materials to assist you in raising the awareness of all your members that pastors don’t just happen. Make plans now for having a special emphasis Sunday late this winter or early spring. Please call upon your coach should you have questions or need assistance.

ANSWER THE CALL COACHES

Conference 1: Rev. Nancy Kauppi
All Saints Lutheran Church
Wakefield, MI 49968

Conference 2: Rev. Lloyd Luedeman
Bethany Lutheran Church
Mohawk, MI 49950

Conference 3: Rev. Tom Lee
Ascension Lutheran Church
Lake Tomahawk, WI 54539

Conference 4: Rev. Bonny Kinnunen
First Lutheran Church
Iron River, MI 49935

Conference 5: Rev. Doug Schoen
Emmanuel Lutheran Church
Menominee, MI 49858

Conference 6: Rev. Devon Barrix
Faith Lutheran Church
Rock, MI 49879

Conference 7: Rev. Barry Levine
Faith Lutheran Church
Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783

Conference 8: Rev. Katherine Finegan
Bethany Lutheran Church
Republic, MI 49879
Autumn comes quickly in the Copper Country, and students are rushing to prepare for their semester’s activities at Finlandia. This fall, prior to most students’ arrivals, Finlandia’s Campus Ministry Team began its prayerful cause: to grow in faith toward God and love toward neighbor, and to make the community aware of, and invite them to, their active ministry at Finlandia.

The early core group of Campus Ministry Leaders met on August 18, a day prior to most students’ arrival and registration. They began brainstorming activity ideas, as well as discussing how best to go about making the Finlandia community aware of the many campus and community opportunities to share and express their faith, spirit, and fellowship. These students were expressing their need to be active and inviting in their faith, and wanted to ‘hit the ground running’ in building campus-wide awareness of the faith community at Finlandia.

Soon, the welcoming came: names filled the Campus Ministry information sheet, students met and conversed, Christian guitar music filtered through buildings and walkways, faith stories were shared, meetings were organized, and relationships with community and MTU ministries were developed. As the new University Chaplain, I found myself blessed to hear many voices promote one cause, calling many to action.

Although it sometimes seems that youth and young adults are missing from or not active in their faith, the Campus Ministry activities I have witnessed my first few weeks at Finlandia are encouraging. I am excited and refreshed by this lively and faithful group of individuals as they share their stories, ask questions, and seek to stretch their understanding in new ways.

As the summer’s green turns to bright fall colors, so too do these ‘green’ students as they brightly paint the campus and community with their faith and love. I am certain they’ll keep our spirits bright throughout the winter months and beyond. Amen.

Any questions or comments? Contact us at soren.schmidt@finlandia.edu or (906) 487-7239.
It was the perfect ending to the first annual inter-church softball game between Pioneer Lake Lutheran (Conover) and Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran (Sayner). No one knew for sure who scored the most runs, but there was a clearly decided winner, Fortune Lake Camp.

The brainchild of Pioneer member, Kurt Ahlborn, the softball game and picnic hearkened back to the good old fashioned outdoor community gatherings that are rapidly becoming just a distant memory. The organizers anticipated seventy to a hundred folks showing up from the two churches for the event. Instead, some 213 people came to play, cheer, eat and share a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the park. Fortunately it was a Lutheran event, so there was no shortage of good food to serve the unexpectedly large turnout.

To make the day even more worthwhile, it was decided early on that the two churches would use the ballgame to raise funds for Fortune Lake Camp. Drawing on some good natured rivalry between the two nearby churches, members were encouraged to not only cheer on their own team, but also to contribute accordingly for the camp. Shepherd went so far as to put a Pledge Card in their Sunday morning bulletin securing
pledges for such traditional things as team hits, runs and at-bats, but also for a few non-traditional things feats like “getting caught chewing tobacco in the dugout”, “picking daisies in the outfield”, and “sliding into second base ... with a skirt on.”

The rules for the game were simple: Pumpkin ball (16 inch softball) and no mitts; Lob pitching; Co-ed lineups, alternating man-woman-man-woman in the batting order; Designated runners were provided for any batter wanting one, which allowed many of our 8-12 year old kids an opportunity to have a ball running the bases; Balls and strikes were called by our honorary umpire for the day, Fortune Lake’s director, Rev. Art Weiss. But everyone “came up swinging” so there was little need for a strike zone.

Between the two teams there were four players age 80 or over who participated and more than a dozen between the ages of 70 and 80. Not all of them played in the field, but they all took their turn hitting. All told more than 65 people played in the game at one point or another.

As of this writing, over $1,600 has been raised for the camp through the contributions of the two churches. “This is the most fun I’ve even seen people have while raising money”, noted SOTL council president Jill Lemke. “And people went away saying more, more, more.”

Submitted by:
Dewey Lindstrom
Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church
Sayner, WI

Have a Mission Story to Tell? We’d love to share it with the NGLS!
To contribute your Mission Possible story for publication in Notes & Quotes, please email your article to:
Pastor Nancy Kauppi
danaKaup@ironbay.net
or
Pastor Jennie Johnson Wrege
jenjohn@nglsynod.org
## Prayer Calendar - October 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pray for</th>
<th>Bishop Skrenes and his colleagues as they attend the Conference of Bishops meeting in Chicago these days.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the members of Ascension, Minocqua and Pastor David Jensen, as they celebrate the 26th anniversary of the congregation this month.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for Christian Education Programs throughout our synod – for the students who are learning and the teachers who are leading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for those attending the Three Lakes Conference Fall Conference Meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the members of Concordia, Palmer &amp; Our Saviour’s, Suomi Location and Interim Pastor Virginia Eggert as they continue in the call process during a pastoral vacancy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the members of Augsburg, Baltimore MD (Rev Eric Campbell), Christ, Upperco MD (Rev Mike Adams), Faith, Baltimore MD (pastor), and Hope, New Castle DE (pastor).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for Pastor Keith Kolstad, his wife Karen, and the members of Zion, Marinette.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the spouses of deceased pastors – Lavina Goodrich and Selma Karjala.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the members of Kijitonyama Lutheran Church (Rev Charles Mzinga), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and their NGLS companion congregation, Our Saviour’s, Iron Mountain (Rev Steve Cowen).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for Pastor Bonny Kinnunen (First, Iron River) as she celebrates her 16th anniversary of ordination. Pray for those attending and those participating in the Fortune Lake Camp Quilt Auction and Chili Cookoff. Pray for those attending the Lay School Alumni Reunion at the Gladstone Campus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for our pastors on Clergy Appreciation Day. We thank God for their presence among us – preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments – for being there to nurture and care for us, to guide and teach, to listen, to challenge us and take us in new directions, and to be examples of God’s love. Pray also for those attending the Delta Conference Fall Conference Meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for those presenting and those attending the Synod sponsored Sexual Misconduct Workshop for clergy in Harvey this day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for those presenting and those attending the Synod sponsored Sexual Misconduct Workshop for clergy in Minocqua this day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for the members of Grace &amp; Mt Zion, Keymar MD (Rev Rick Rutkauskas), Lord of Life, Edgewood MD (Rev Paige Evers), and Reformation, Milford DE (Rev John Ranney).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray for prayer ministries across our synod – prayer chains, prayer shawls, prayer beads, whatever ways we offer prayer to God for those in need and those who rejoice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>Pastor Bucky Beach</strong> and the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Good Shepherd, Houghton</strong> and <strong>Our Saviour, Atlantic Mine</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>music ministries</strong> across our synod as we raise our voices and musical talents to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Pray for those attending the <strong>IGO Conference Fall Conference Meeting</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pray for the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Christ the King, Escanaba</strong> and <strong>Interim Pastor Len Gilley</strong> as they celebrate the <strong>51st anniversary of the congregation</strong> this day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>Pastor Bill Jacobson</strong> and the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Zion, Metropolitan</strong> as they celebrate <strong>6 years of ministry together</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>Pastor Michael Langlais</strong>, his <strong>wife Mary</strong>, and the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Bethany, Norway</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pray for the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>St James, Rockdale MD (Rev Bob Day)</strong>, <strong>St John, Pimlico MD (Rev Gregg Knepp)</strong>, <strong>St Matthew, Baltimore MD (Rev John Kulczycki)</strong> and <strong>St Paul, Fundstown MD (Rev Darrell Layman)</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Pray for those <strong>congregation members</strong> from <strong>Immanuel-Negaunee, First-Iron River, Gethsemane-Wallace, &amp; St Stephens-Stephenson</strong> attending and the <strong>Synod team</strong> presenting at the <strong>Transformational Ministry Overnight</strong> these days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pray for the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Emanuel, Skandia</strong> and <strong>Interim Pastor Jim Duehring</strong> as they continue in the call process during a <strong>pastoral vacancy</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Pray for our <strong>seminary candidates</strong> who await calls, those who are soon to be ordained, and those who have recently been ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>Pastor John Kuziej</strong> and the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Pioneer Lake, Conover</strong> as they celebrate the <strong>106th anniversary of the congregation</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Pray for our <strong>retired pastors and their spouses</strong> – <strong>Pastor Karlo &amp; Eunice Keljo</strong> and <strong>Pastor George Krebs</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pray for <strong>Pastor Bill Shepard</strong>, his <strong>wife Diane</strong>, and the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>Bethel, Menominee</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Pray for the <strong>members</strong> of <strong>St Peter, Clear Spring MD (Rev Elaine Swinehart)</strong>, <strong>St Timothy, Dundalk MD (Rev Bill Hayman)</strong> and <strong>Zion, Williamsport MD (Revs Greg Martin &amp; Marty Roberson)</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pray for those who volunteer for <strong>Adults Saving Kids</strong> and the young people whose lives they touch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pray that the God who reformed the church through <strong>Martin Luther</strong> five centuries ago, may continue to <strong>reform - and transform - the church today</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections on the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and the Bible
Pastor Timothy J. Wengert
Ministerium of Pennsylvania Professor, Reformation History
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
(This essay is available at www.elca.org/jie)

[1] If there is one rule we need to follow in the wake of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, it is this: Do not break the eighth commandment (against false witness) in order to defend the sixth (against adultery and other sexual sins). Both those who supported the changes in policy and those who did not need to remember this. We must speak what we know and not cast aspersions on those who disagreed with us. Luther’s comments on the eighth commandment in the Large Catechism are helpful here. Even when forced by one’s office to speak out, one must not lie or distort the truth.

[2] In light of some implied (and explicit) attacks on the decision, however, it is also necessary to make one thing clear. The change in policy was grounded in Scripture. In fact, the calls for justice toward gays and lesbians in committed relationships and the recitation of examples of healthy same-gender relations, as important as these are to some folk, finally do not in themselves constitute a complete standard for changing church policy, since even calls for justice must for Christians be grounded in and normed by sound interpretations of Scripture as God’s Word for us.

[3] What does this argument from Scripture look like? It is an argument from the law but in this fashion. The social statement on sexuality began with reference to the question posed to Christ about the greatest commandment. As we know, Jesus recited two commandments: love God above all else and one’s neighbor as one’s self. As Luther pointed out in his interpretation of Galatians, when Paul in both Galatians and Romans mentions only love of neighbor, it is not because he meant both commandments, as the church father Jerome had argued. Instead, Luther stated, Paul realized that the command to love God with all one’s heart, mind, soul, etc. is indeed fulfilled for us through justification by grace through faith on account of Christ alone. As a result, Christians are free by faith to serve the neighbor.

[4] What we often forget in Jesus’ answer to the question of commandments is the next phrase, “on these depend the law and the prophets.” The word in Greek is literally “hang.” The debate over sexuality in the ELCA in some ways “hangs” on these words of Jesus. The ELCA with its decisions at the churchwide assembly is now stating that in this passage Jesus gave us a key to understand the Scriptures, that is, a lens through which we may interpret every other command in Scripture. Every command in Scripture must be focused by this question: “How does following this commandment enhance love for God and
neighbor?" By asking this question of every other scriptural command, one remains truly faithful to Scripture.

[5] There is also another way to claim faithfulness to Scripture, and that is to interpret this saying of Jesus in the opposite way. Then one would say that commandments in Scripture define what the love of God and neighbor should be. Then the Christian responsibility is a matter of following the laws of Scripture and applying them to themselves and others precisely because they reflect that twofold love. As I listened to the debate in Minneapolis this past week, it seemed to me that some opposed to these changes were arguing along these lines. There are commandments in Scripture referring to homosexual activity; these determine how we must love God and neighbor; therefore we cannot change church policy. To those who support the first way of interpreting Jesus’ statement, however, this approach would seem to turn his statement on its head and to assume that the command to love God and neighbor is normed by, hangs on, the commands in Scripture and not the other way around.

[6] Along with this difference in approaching laws in Scripture comes a second matter, and that has to do with whether a particular passage in Scripture applies to the present. For some, the question might even be whether we have the right to “pick and choose” one passage over another. Here Martin Luther can help us. In the mid-1520s, he was opposed by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, among others, who argued that Old Testament commandments, including those regarding the Sabbath and tithing, must be rigorously applied to Christians. In response to such claims, Luther wrote the following. One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God’s word, whether God has spoken it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day. … The word in Scripture is of two kinds: the first does not pertain or apply to me, the other kind does. … The false prophets pitch in and say, “Dear people, this is the word of God.” This is true; we cannot deny it. But we are not “the people.” (LW 35: 170.)

[7] Thus, the scriptural argument for changing the ELCA policy toward gays and lesbians in committed, lifelong, monogamous relationships—and it is a scriptural argument—has at least two parts. In the first place, it is argued that the Scripture passages dealing with homosexual actions are not at all aimed at homosexual orientation and behavior in the present but at very specific issues regarding, in Leviticus, standards of holiness that set the people of Israel apart from the pagan temple cults and, in the Pauline material, the coercive relations of male-on-male sexual activities. (For the specific arguments, see the biblical study commissioned by the task force and referred to in the social statement.) The passage in Romans 1, which includes the only biblical reference to female sexual activity, must also be seen in the context of practices among Gentiles that Paul’s Jewish readers would have easily condemned, and it actually sets up the
condemnation of those very readers in Romans 2. Thus, the argument, far from being unscriptural, takes Scripture very seriously but says, using Luther’s advice, this does not apply here. (It is important to note, however, that the argument is not “this never fostered love of God and neighbor.” In their original contexts and in similar ones in our day and age, these commandments arose out of concern for the neighbor and continue to protect the neighbor from idolatrous or coercive behavior.)

[8] But, in addition to the question of whether these passages apply in this case—something Luther invites us to ask—we have the command of Jesus and must ask a second question: how do I best love my neighbor in this situation? Luther, too, referred to this principle when dealing with the Wittenberg church’s insistence that people receive the cup in the Lord’s Supper in order to fulfill Jesus’ command. He said that they were right about faith (the principle involved) but lacking in love and patience (the practice). Love of neighbor norms how Christians apply God’s law in specific situations.

[9] How might one decide whether this question outlined above regarding the law of love and the commands in Scripture is an accurate one? For this we have the example of Jesus himself. Jesus did two things vis-à-vis the law. First, by including in the simple commands against murder and adultery (among others) hatred, slander and lust, he made it impossible for us to boast that we can keep the law. We are all mortal sinners. Second, he broke specific, God-given laws for the sake of love of neighbor. One of the best examples he left us in this regard comes with the man who had a shriveled hand (Mark 3:4; Matthew 12:12; Luke 6:9). It was the Sabbath; the man was not in mortal danger; so the traditional response of a physician would be, “Make an appointment with my secretary and I’ll see you tomorrow.” That way the man would be healed and the Sabbath would be kept holy. Jesus, however, asks a different question: “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?” That is, does the command to love the neighbor (doing good to the man) norm (we might even say trump) the third commandment to keep the Sabbath holy?

[10] This concern for the neighbor’s situation is not, however, a subtle scheme to undermine the law. Indeed, Jesus’ behavior itself functions as law in condemning legalists who cling to the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit. Moreover, in several places in the gospels he explicitly condemns just this sort of misuse of the law for neglecting weightier matters or imagining that externals were more important than what comes out of a person’s heart. These specific questions (“Does this apply to my neighbor?” and “How do I love my neighbor?”) do not destroy the law but rather use the law in ways that do not harm the neighbor in need. Thus, this approach to the Bible, far from being “antinomian” (against the law), as some have alleged, actually insists upon taking Jesus’ command to love the neighbor with complete seriousness.

[11] Thus, the following biblical questions lie at the heart of the present debate.
How does one best love the neighbors who are homosexual, living in lifelong, monogamous committed relationships? Can one welcome them as they are? Can one support them publicly with the prayers of the community and the promises of God? Can one open to them places of leadership within the ELCA? Within the ELCA there have come to be at least two responses to this question. The Churchwide Assembly voted to affirm one biblical response while, at the same time, recognizing that there are many Christians in the church whose consciences are bound to a different, opposing scriptural response. Whether we can live into this disagreement remains to be seen. What is important for all participants to respect, I believe, is that both sides, not just one, employ thoroughly biblical arguments at the heart of their positions.

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