

Pastors' Response to Affiliations Assessment & Council Resolution May 12, 2010

Over the last few weeks and months, many in the congregation have asked that the pastors make their views known on the issues before the congregation. You as members of the congregation are entitled to know your pastors' views. This is an attempt to share those views, especially related to some of the most often asked questions regarding the task force report. The initial draft was written by Pastor Dornbusch. Other pastors then made suggestions and comments. These comments reflect the position of all of our pastors who are involved in a decision-making and teaching role on our staff, and all are united in their support of the task force recommendation.

The make-up of the task force: Appointing 10 former presidents to this task force was a stroke of genius by our present council chair, Jeff Johnson. Had any other group been appointed, they probably would have been criticized by people and groups on both sides of the issue, but this group's long history, divergent views and unique background as congregational presidents gave them instant and ongoing credibility.

The process of the task force: This group worked very hard on what seemed to be an impossible task. If you were to have asked any of the members even two weeks before the recommendation were written, they would have all said that the possibility of a unanimous recommendation was zero. Two members of the group on opposite sides of the issue got together and came up with a beginning point on how the task force could move forward. The chair, Dayton Soby, then took their initial work and wrote what we believe is one of the most insightful, well-written and inspired documents we have ever seen. As the document is being shared via the internet across the country, that view is being reinforced weekly.

Did Pastor Steve or other pastors manipulate or influence the process or the outcome?

There are some who are saying, "This is what Pastor Steve wanted, and the task force just did what he told them to." Nothing could be further from the truth. Input was requested from the pastors, but the outcome was entirely directed by the task force. In fact, were he to have directed the recommendation, it would have gone in a completely different direction. However, Pastor Steve has said that what the task force has done is so much better than he could have ever done or directed. He believes their solution is far better than anything he could have come up with, and we believe that, in the end, it is much better for Calvary that this recommendation comes from this group of committed lay people rather than the pastors. However, we also believe it is important that you know that we as pastors unanimously support the recommendation of the task force.

Does this mean we're leaving the ELCA? The task force is recommending terminating the legal and constitutional relationship with the ELCA but, and this is crucial, we are all attempting to move to a new and different kind of relationship. The task force is clear that it wants not only to maintain an ongoing and significant relationship with the ELCA, but also to do that under what has been called a new paradigm. Your staff is also committed to continue in ministry with the ELCA in as far as the ELCA will allow us to do that. No one wants to sever relationships with world hunger efforts, LSS, Luther Seminary, Disaster Relief Services, Refugee and Resettlement programs, world missions, or any number of other agencies and programs to which we have been intimately tied. The task force recommendation allows us to partner with the ELCA in a different kind of relationship that we believe will be healthier in the long run.

Will this change the teaching position of Calvary regarding sexuality? No. Since its inception, Calvary has taught that physical sexual expression is intended by God to be part of a life-long committed marriage between a man and a woman. We believe anything other than that is less than God's intention. Your church council has affirmed that stand on a number of occasions throughout the last 10 years. That being said, Calvary does not categorize sins or rank some sins as being worse than others. Regardless of the decision of the congregation on the task force recommendation, the teaching position of Calvary will continue to be the same.

If Calvary passes this recommendation by the required two-thirds vote, what will change at Calvary? For the overwhelming majority of people at Calvary, absolutely nothing will change. Worship, mission and ministry will go on exactly as it always has. It is our hope that this recommendation will help us to take this subject off the front burner and allow us to focus on ministry and mission in a stronger way than we have been able to do while this issue has dominated discussion in the ELCA for the last 10 years. Pastor Tacho has also shared that this recommendation will definitely benefit his ministry with Spanish-speaking people, as well as any outreach that we have to ethnic minorities in our community.

Point 4 in the recommendation talks of specifically welcoming gays and lesbians to Calvary. What does that mean? The task force has intentionally tried not to be specific on exactly what form that will take, but we as your pastors suggest a few things that it could mean and a few things that it will not:

- First of all, we don't believe welcoming happens by virtue of advertising campaigns or slogans. It happens as individuals meet, get to know, appreciate and love people who are sometimes similar and sometimes different than they are.
- We would do a better job of encouraging people to build relationships with people who are different than them, whether in the area of sexuality or any other area.
- We would do a better job of helping people to understand themselves and how their own prejudices, often unperceived, get in the way of building those relationships.
- We would do a better job of helping people to realize that God's love is intended for *all* people, not just some or not just those who happen to agree with us.
- There may be specific ways that we can express our solidarity with those who are devastated by HIV and AIDS, as well as actively support medical research and distribution of medical resources where needed.
- We would do a better job of teaching against any kind of hatred or cruelty directed at any group, including gays and lesbians.
- We would not change our teaching on sexuality but would continue to teach as we believe Scripture teaches, that physical sexual expression outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sin, not worse than any other sin, but sin nevertheless.
- We would work hard to affirm what Calvary and the ELCA (prior to the August 2009 Assembly) have taught that homosexual orientation in and of itself is not sinful and one's sexual orientation neither qualifies nor disqualifies a person for leadership in a congregation.
- We would continue to dialogue about how we can best communicate our love for all people without compromising our Biblical beliefs.
- We would encourage all people to deal especially gently and humbly with one another and with the topic before us, knowing that devoted Christian people do not agree with one another on this or any number of other issues.

What is the greatest strength of the recommendation for Calvary? We believe very strongly that the task force has found a new paradigm that has the potential of forming a strong foundation for Calvary to move forward. This recommendation embraces a tension between loving our neighbor and holding to our traditional Biblical interpretation. If you were to ask anyone on the task force or the church council, they would all say that, through the process of this discussion, they made efforts to find a place that could be a win-win solution for our congregation rather than a win-lose proposition. That often meant listening to one another intently and, in almost every case, it meant adjusting one's own position based on new information or compelling reasons from another's point of view. That's what makes the document and the recommendation so crucial. We're afraid that any attempt to change the recommendation will destroy that tension and therefore take away the strength of the document. In the end, we believe the task force recommendation, now endorsed by the church council, provides the absolute best possibility for Calvary to move forward and to maintain the most unity at Calvary. We believe that not passing this recommendation could have a negative impact on the future unity of Calvary, and we would strongly encourage you to vote "yes" for the proposed recommendation.

Will this make everyone happy? We're not that naïve. But we believe this recommendation provides the framework for the most people to work and live together in the midst of differing views. We'll be honest. If you are one that wants your church to condemn all gays and lesbians to hell or declare that homosexual sin is in some way worse than other sins, this recommendation will not do that. If you are one that wants Calvary to bless same-sex unions or ordain practicing gays and lesbians, this recommendation will not do that. But if you can live somewhere between those two poles, we believe this recommendation gives us opportunity to do that.



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