

July 31, 2018

LETTER TO ALL THE ELCA SYNODICAL BISHOPS  
REGARDING THE RECENT YOUTH GATHERING

We hear many good reports from those who attended the recent Youth Gathering. These positives include great fellowship with other youth from one's own congregation as well as from across the church, the opportunity to be involved in works of service throughout the greater Houston area, and the inspiring experience of worshipping God with thirty thousand other young people. However, we as the board of Lutheran CORE are gravely concerned about and even deeply offended by the choice of some of the keynote speakers at the event.

The social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," which was approved by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, clearly states that there is not agreement within the ELCA and that there would be a place for a variety of views, including the traditional view, within the church. After describing four different perspectives that people hold "with conviction and integrity" (page 20), the document says that "this church . . . encourages all people to live out their faith . . . with profound respect for the conscience-bound belief of the neighbor" (page 21). And yet the recent Youth Gathering was a major example of the violation of that agreement.

One of the keynote speakers, the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, led the audience through a series of questions, in which she asked thirty thousand young people whether they renounce a list of lies. Included in these renunciations was the question, "Do you renounce the lie that queerness is anything other than beauty?" The arena full of young people shouted their agreement.

Rather than upholding the ELCA's commitment to give a place for different understandings of human sexuality, and rather than showing "profound respect for the conscience-bound belief of the neighbor" who holds to the traditional view, this speaker - at an official gathering of thirty thousand young members of the ELCA - labelled the traditional view as a lie. As an official and privileged representative from the ELCA she described those who hold to the traditional view as beholden to a lie from Satan that must be renounced.

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly did not approve bisexuality, transgenderism, or any of the other forms of sexual identity and expression that are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. And yet the thirty thousand youth who attended the gathering were subjected to a blatant promotion of transgenderism as they heard from a very remarkable eleven-year-old child and that child's mother. We of Lutheran CORE have

also heard from people who were deeply disturbed as they discovered stations in the Interactive Learning area that promoted “full inclusion.” One person said, “The sheer number of booths that had something overtly relating to sexuality was alarming.”

We cannot understand how the Council of Bishops could be totally silent about the “We Are Naked and Unashamed” movement which has risen out of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. The 2009 Churchwide Assembly approved one kind of same-sex relationship – those that are publicly accountable, lifelong, and monogamous (PALMS) – as it acknowledged that some people within the ELCA would be in favor of applying the term “marriage” to that kind of same-sex relationship. And yet the “We Are Naked and Unashamed” movement rejects as oppressive marriage by any definition as normative for sexual activity. It even gives a place for advocating for polyamory (multiple partners).

We as the board of Lutheran CORE are certain that the majority of people sitting in the pews of ELCA churches would be completely horrified if they knew what sorts of things are being subscribed to and promoted by a significant number of ELCA pastors and seminarians. And yet we are not aware of any time when the Council of Bishops, the Presiding Bishop, the Church Council, or the administration and faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago have even addressed, let alone rejected, the positions of the “We Are Naked and Unashamed” movement. Instead, at least two of the signers of the movement, the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber and the Rev. Tuhina Verma Rasche, were invited to be keynote speakers at the recent Youth Gathering.

How can we view these recent events in the ELCA as anything other than a massive breach of trust? How can we say anything other than that the ELCA cannot be trusted because it does not honor the commitments that were made and it does not respect the boundaries that were set as part of the decisions on human sexuality at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly? The ELCA repeatedly says that the Churchwide Assembly is the highest legislative authority within the church. And yet all the evidence is that the LGBTQIA+ community has the greatest power. This community has not only been able to force the firing of a seminary president, they also set the agenda of a gathering that is shaping the minds of the future members, pastors, and other leaders of the church.

We as the board of Lutheran CORE have also written to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton to express our concerns. We call upon the Council of Bishops to join with her in doing three things.

First, we call upon you to exercise the authority of your office and hold the organizers of the Youth Gathering accountable. We urge you to speak with them about the ways in which they have violated the trust of faithful members of the ELCA as they have

broken the agreements that were made by the ELCA. We ask you to set up a better system of monitoring and reporting so that the organizers of the Youth Gathering never again plan and hold an event that is in such direct violation of approved ELCA standards and convictions.

Second, we call upon you to restore sanity to the ELCA's teachings on human sexuality. A good place to begin would be to work with the administration and faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago to renounce the "We Are Naked and Unashamed" movement.

Third, we respectfully request that you publicly affirm that the social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," still reflects the position of the ELCA. We ask you to affirm publicly that convictions 1 and 2 as described on page 20 of that document, which represent the more traditional view of human sexuality, are still seen as acceptable positions, which some people within the ELCA hold "with conviction and integrity." They are not lies from Satan that need to be renounced.

These actions taken on your part would do much to restore a sense of trust as they would demonstrate that the ELCA still "encourages all people to live out their faith . . . with profound respect for the conscience bound belief of the neighbor."

Thank you for the pastoral care and leadership that you are giving to the ELCA. We pray for wisdom, courage, and strength for you as you lead us in being God's Church for the sake of the world.

Sincerely,

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