

ADVENT

November 2010

Seven Area Pastors Received on to ELCA Roster of Ordained Clergy

By Dawn Roginski

As one of the seven to be received on July 25, 2010, I admit that this event would feel like another hoop to jump through in order to validate the ministry I was already doing. This left me wondering if this Rite was really about me. But as the planning unfolded, my own clarity also unfolded, and I realized that this is about me, and we could make the Rite contain more than the official words necessary to make us ELCA pastors. We could make the Rite about reconciliation, allowing those present and those who come in contact with the liturgy a chance to let go of anger, resentment and hopelessness towards the ELCA while allowing the ELCA to fully embrace these and welcome them

into full worship life. This certainly was not an easy task, but I think we went far in accomplishing this goal.

So many wonderful things must be noted about this service, but I will highlight just a few that stood out for me. First, I really appreciated that Bishop Mark Holmerud decided to be the confessor to start the service. This confession did not shy away from naming the injustice and pain caused by policies of exclusion and having the bishop speak these words, as one who represents those responsible for the policies, gave the confession teeth and allowed it to really sink into the hearts and minds of those present, starting us down the road towards reconciliation.

As we moved into the Liturgy of the Word, we heard readings of reconciliation from both the Hebrew scriptures and Paul's

letters, the former read in Hebrew by an out trans rabbi and the latter read in a way that could have been its own sermon. In the midst of these readings was another memorable event. Judith Dancer danced for us accompanied by wonderful music. Judith had a conversation with me and Jeff Johnson where she asked us to talk about our experience with the ELCA and our process of arriving at reception. She included all these thoughts in her dance: struggle, anger, movement and finally joy, doing it so artfully that I felt I was seeing my actual experience in front of me. I do not think there were many dry eyes when she was done.

The high level of emotional energy was maintained during the wonderful sermon by Nadia Bolz-Weber, who told us how God goes out and gets us. And then we moved into the Rite itself. Before the service, I was a little grumpy about having bishops lay their hands on my

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Bishop Holmerud blesses the "Sierra Pacific Seven" during the Rite of Reception at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, San Francisco. (Photo by Stephen Lawson)

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From the Co-Chair: The Pause that Refreshes

By Dale Loepf

Like most hikers, I invariably pause for a few minutes after an arduous climb and look back—or sometimes down—taking some time to survey the landscape. Pausing to assess the distance already traveled is helpful because it provides encouragement that the intended destination will indeed be reached. And even though “plateau” experiences can be intensely satisfying, they are neither trailhead nor destination. You cannot simply stay there; at some point you need to begin walking again.

In my own view, Lutherans Concerned has reached a space in which to pause and reflect, not only on what has happened over the past year but also to think about how conditions have changed from the era of its inception. Past results are heartening, but many of the same needs also press us forward toward other projects and areas of emphasis.

When I think of the future of Lutherans Concerned, two ideas always leap to the forefront: justice and reconciliation. Demands for justice require prophetic voices—and such voices are usually not very well received, at least not at first. And whether we chose to recognize it or not, debate and dissent have been a part of Christianity from the very beginning. Paul, who apparently

was no stranger to intense conflict even in his own ministry (Acts 15:39), addresses one of his earliest letters to the particularly contentious church at Corinth. To make his point, Paul employs the image of the Body of Christ in an attempt to help his readers better understand this somewhat bizarre mix of diversity in the midst of relationship. Using the notion of body parts, Paul not only stresses their radical difference—eyes and feet are very different in form and function—but also describes their radical connectivity: when one part of the body suffers, the rest of the body does as well (1Cor 12:26). Justice demands equal dignity for all members of the body; reconciliation reminds us that we are all still attached to the *one* body.

How will concerned Lutherans in the Bay Area continue to move forward as agents of both justice and reconciliation? In addressing this question, the Executive Committee of LC/SF-BA has committed itself to thinking about the future of our organization along paths that are already very familiar (such as our “Reconciling in Christ” initiatives) but also in ways that may be less familiar. We are currently arranging some retreat time to think more about what these next steps will be. If you have ideas or suggestions, we’d love to hear from you.

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Photos of Rite of Reception from <http://sps7rite.blogspot.com>.

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WORLD AIDS DAY LITURGY WITH HOLY COMMUNION WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 6:00 PM

Join us for an evening of worship with leaders and clergy from the community as we remember those who have died of AIDS, support those who are living with HIV/AIDS and their families and friends, and continue to raise awareness in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

Presiding Minister: Bishop Mark Holmerud, Sierra Pacific Synod ELCA

Preacher: Pastor Maggi Henderson, Old First Presbyterian Church, San Francisco

**St. Mark’s Lutheran Church
1111 O’Farrell St., San Francisco**



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head and have me repeat the vows I had already made; however, my attitude changed in the moment. I was impressed that bishops from other synods traveled and made time on their schedules to be there. I was also pleased that Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus was present, a bishop I had come to know and respect. They were there not just out of a sense of duty, but prayed for me and my ministry because they cared. When they put their hands on my head, I felt all this loving energy coming through. The spirit was weaving her way not only on our heads, but in our hearts as well.

As we moved into the Liturgy of the Eucharistic Meal, we had an element that I have heard caused some controversy. Instead of one version of the Prayer of Jesus (or the Lord’s Prayer if you insist), we



The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, preaches the gospel.

(Photo by Stephen Lawson)

had six, including a feminist version and the version from the World Council of Churches. I started to pray and then I had to just listen. Every person was able to pray in the way that was comfortable, that spoke to them most powerfully and it was truly beautiful as the words blended together into a whole that was much greater than any individual prayer. I would like to think that we had our own Pentecost moment as the Spirit was smiling upon us.

The last thing to mention is a personal highlight. My parents were able to be present with me at the service, so we also had some time to visit. They have both been very supportive of me and were excited that this service was happening. My father is not a very emotional person, which I have come to expect, but something changed this day. He sought me out during the sharing of the Peace. When he got to me, he embraced me fully with both arms, tapped me on the back and said, “I am so happy for you!” and he smiled at me with his mouth and his eyes sparkling. I could not help but cry tears of joy and I have to say that I still get tears in my eyes when I think of it.

So by now you can see that



Bishop Holmerud lays hands on the Rev. Ross Merkel, reinstating him to the ELCA clergy roster. (Photo by Pamela Diane Gilbert-Snyder)

this was quite a powerful day and thanks to all the wonderful volunteers a welcoming, wonderful service. I would like to think we accomplished our goal of reconciliation for those who attended. What I did not completely expect was what a day of reconciliation it was for me. My own heart was opened to new possibilities. I was able to let go of my own resentment and anger towards the ELCA who excluded me from their roster. I was started down the road of actually living into being an ELCA pastor. I can no longer talk of the ELCA as “them” because now I am one of “them.” And with God’s help, we will deepen our bonds and truly do ministry together

May it be so!

Current RIC Congregations and Organizations

Thanksgiving Lutheran Church, Santa Rosa
 Marin Lutheran Church, Corte Madera
 Peace Lutheran Church, Danville
 St Mark’s Lutheran Church, Pleasant Hill
 Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Davis
 Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Sacramento
 St John’s Lutheran Church, Sacramento
 Community Lutheran Church, West Sacramento
 Christ Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 Ebenezer Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 St Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 St Mark’s Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 St Paulus Lutheran Church, San Francisco
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Alameda
 Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Berkeley



University Lutheran Church, Berkeley
 Christ Lutheran Church, El Cerrito
 St Paul Lutheran Church, Oakland
 United Lutheran Church of Oakland, Oakland
 Grace Lutheran Church, Richmond
 Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, Newark
 First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Palo Alto
 University Lutheran Church, Palo Alto
 Peace Lutheran Church, San Bruno
 Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, San Jose
 Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, San Jose
 Immanuel Lutheran Church, San Jose
 New Creation Lutheran Church, San Jose
 St John’s Lutheran Church, Sunnyvale
 Epiphany Lutheran and Episcopal Church, Marina
 Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley

Cary Bass Named First “Michael Pozar LGBT Seminarian Scholarship” Recipient

By Gabriele Schroeder

In celebration of the recent ELCA policy changes applying to LGBT clergy and in recognition of the increasing financial needs of Lutheran candidates for ordained ministry, the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of Lutherans Concerned recently established a new \$1,000 scholarship, named in honor of the late Rev. Michael Pozar (1952-2001).

Michael Pozar, a native of Chico, California, lived in San Francisco for 15 years. After attending Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and earning his Master of Divinity degree in 1987, he was ordained at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in 1992. From 1992 until 1995 he served as pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Pacifica. He was the founder of the Lutheran AIDS Network (LANET), cofounder of *Accion Luterana*, Volunteer Coordinator for *Shanti*, a talented writer and musician, and an active member and supporter of Lutheran Concerned. In February 2001 Michael Pozar died at home after a long battle with AIDS.

Scholarship applicants must

- be sexual minority (LGBTiQ) seminarians,
- be currently enrolled or plan to enroll in the Master of Divinity program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (priority is given to first-year M.Div. students and second-career students),
- be members of an ELCA congregation for at least one year prior to applying for the scholarship,
- be legal residents of the 50 United States or the District of Columbia, and
- complete and submit the attached application form by June 30.

During its October business meeting, the executive committee voted to award the first Michael Pozar LGBT Seminarian Scholarship to Cary Bass, a first-year student enrolled in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS).

In his application, Cary stated that he received God’s call to ministry when he was a teenager while attending confirmation class at his childhood church. As Cary got older, though, he sadly felt that his childhood calling was incompatible with his emerging sexual identity as a gay man. He subsequently stopped attending church altogether and no longer heard God’s call to the ministry. After moving to San Francisco and attending worship services at a local Lutheran church, Cary heard God’s voice again and applied to the M.Div. program at PLTS.

Cary’s renewed sense of call to the ministry demonstrates the many ways in which God speaks to all of us. God does not only speak to the faithful in dreams and visions and not only during the quiet hours

Cary Bass standing in front of his congregation, St. Francis Lutheran Church in San Francisco.



of night, but God speaks to us even through the synod assembly debates and policy changes. God speaks through Churchwide Assemblies and their decisions, through congregations that vote to rejoin a denomination which previously expelled them, and through the reception of ELM clergy onto the ECA clergy roster.

We wish Cary and his partner God’s blessings as they together travel on this new, exciting road. May the Michael Pozar Scholarship ease your financial burden a little bit. Thank you, Cary, for your willingness to dedicate yourself to serve God and God’s people!



Bishop Holmerud, Bishop Associate Nelson, their spouses, and representatives of LC congregations ready themselves as the parade begins (story on page 5).

Lutherans Concerned at the 40th San Francisco Pride Parade

By Gabriele Schroeder

While we all know that much work remains to be done—inside as well as outside the churches—to secure the full equality of LGBT people, “to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die,” a time to campaign and a time to party...

For us Lutherans, this year’s Pride Parade was different from any other of the previous parades. In the past, the Lutherans Concerned contingent at the parade, despite its exuberant and celebratory spirit, was a vivid reminder that things were not as they are supposed to be in the church. Churches, the body of Christ on earth, are far from being the welcoming, loving, kind, and unconditionally accepting presence that God intended them to be—as many among us have experienced first-hand. Rather, most church bodies are known for exclusivity, judgmentalism, hypocrisy, arrogance, sexism, racism, and homophobia.

This year, however, things were different at parade contingent number 169. To begin with, we paraded with a lot more style. Thanks to Kyle Schiefelbein and others, our frontal banner and RIC signs were given a 21st-century aesthetic overhaul; the old hard-to-handle banners made from PVC pipes and canvas are gone for good. The main difference, however, was not the new style, but the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly’s vote to end the discrimination against LGBT clergy, to adopt the ELCA Sexuality Study, and to develop blessing ceremonies for same-gender couples.

Together, the new look of the signs and the new day in ELCA policies made the parade a truly exciting experience for all who marched in the LC/San Francisco-Bay Area contingent. As in previous years, many of the 31 Bay Area RIC congregations were represented, plus the addition of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. As during the last three years, Bishop Mark Holmerud, his wife Debbie, Bishop

Associate Nancy Nelson, and her husband Jim were very visibly present at the parade, riding in a stylish red convertible generously loaned to LC/SF-BA. In addition, a group of LGBT Mormons joined our parade contingent, which made for some informative ecumenical conversations. The parade itself was preceded by a joint Lutheran/Episcopalian Eucharist, where Lutheran Bishop Holmerud preached and Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus presided.

It does not take much for the exuberant spirit of the parade to catch on and to paint smiles onto peoples’ faces. The best reward, though, for all the work that goes into organizing our Pride Parade contingent are the many quietly mouthed “thank you” greetings from numerous people watching the parade from the sidelines. At the parade, we are the public face of a welcoming church – and people are grateful to see people of faith that embrace them in the name of a gracious God.



Above: Representatives of LC chapter congregations carry the new “You’re Welcome Here” signs as the parade begins.

Top-Right: Lutheran Bishop Mark Holmerud preaches at the pre-parade worship service.

Bottom-Right: Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus presides at the sacrament at the pre-parade worship service.



Vital Congregations and Just Communities: Synod Assembly 2010

By Joe Haletky

Last May, we gathered in Reno for the first time as a Synod Assembly “post-policy-change.” One of the most important parts of the agenda, although it never appeared as a separate agenda item, was the implementation of the policy changes relating to sexuality and the church voted by the previous summer’s Churchwide Assembly, and given direction by subsequent Church Council and Conference of Bishops meetings. At the same time, a strong felt need existed to move on to other issues and not be fixated on the sexuality issues we had seemingly been obsessed by for the past several years.

The theme of the Assembly, “Vital Congregations, Just Communities,” addressed both parts of the agenda. Many congregations faced division and dissension about sexuality, which sapped their vitality, while a few congregations even have left the ELCA because they were dissatisfied with the Synod and Churchwide

organizations that, to be fair, stemmed from much more than the sexuality decisions. Much discussion on, as well as off, the floor of the Assembly occurred about how we as individuals, as congregations and as a synod, will live into the new reality of a welcoming, reconciling church while respecting the bound consciences of those who will take time to accept (or not) the policy changes.

The one part of the agenda which explicitly related to the sexuality policy changes was a late resolution brought by the San Francisco Conference to expedite the restoration of First United and Saint Francis Lutheran churches, our two expelled congregations, as ELCA congregations, “should either or both desire to be recognized and received as such”. This resolution passed overwhelmingly: 241-24 with 13 abstentions. Both congregations are now in the process of going through the steps to become reinstated. In July, St. Francis voted 69-1 to seek to become an official part of the ELCA once again.

It was also reported (and celebrated at our famous Lutherans Concerned party) that many of our ELM pastors, including Ross Merkel of St. Paul’s Oakland, who was removed from the roster by a church trial, were in the process of being restored and/or received onto the roster of pastors of the ELCA. This process culminated in July in a festive service at St. Mark’s, San Francisco. Meanwhile, Pastor Jeff Johnson was elected to the Synod Council as a clergy member, albeit with an asterisk pending his reception onto the roster. Jeff and Pastor Dawn Roginski (both with asterisks) were defeated in the election of voting members to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

This was a Synod Assembly unlike many of the assemblies we have experienced in recent years: relatively little controversy and drama, but a realization on everyone’s part that there was a lot of serious and hard work to do to accomplish the effective Gospel witness of our Vital Congregations and Just Communities.

Coming Together for Advocacy: Believe Out Loud Power Summit

By Steven Krefting

Orlando, site of next year’s Churchwide Assembly, hosted a far more unusual gathering last month, the *Believe Out Loud Power Summit*. Co-sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce and a host of Christian LGBT advocacy organizations, this was a first of its kind, gathering of Christian advocates for fuller welcoming and inclusion of LGBT people in the churches of the United States and Canada. Among the 400 attendees were about 90 Lutherans, including five from Lutherans Concerned/SF-BA and another five from LC/Sacramento.

We gathered from October 9

to 11 at the Doubletree Resort. This unprecedented gathering signals a recognition in the larger LGBT movement of the importance of groups like ours to the overall cause of a society free from bias toward LGBT people. The overall purpose was training in organizing techniques and leadership of “change” organizations, and networking.

All participants were divided into four “tracks”: Leadership and Board Development, Campaigns, Communications and Barriers, Resistance and Conflict. There were mixed opinions of the substance and utility of the various tracks. However, the track leaders were largely responsive to feedback

regarding the program content as the conference progressed. And there were some truly inspiring and exceptional speakers at the plenaries and in some of the tracks.

Two fundamental challenges became obvious early on: one, the conference attendees had a wide range of degrees of experience in organizing, campaigning and church politics; and two, the secular organizers and workshop leaders did not really speak the same language as the faith based community leaders, so there was some disconnect. As a first of its kind effort, this was to be expected. Some of the great satisfactions,

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Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters: LC/NA Assembly 2010

By Luke Williams

Jubilation filled the humid air: bells tolling and banners were rippling as the procession of worshipers leaving Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis this past July at *Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters*, the Lutherans Concerned/North America Assembly and Reconciling in Christ Conference. The procession's destination was Hall E of the Minneapolis Convention Center, the site of the historic Churchwide Assembly vote last summer, which allowed for partnered LGBT pastors to be added to the denomination's roster. We sang a hymn in that vast space, prayed, then let out a joyful noise—applause and cheers that were stifled for a year—what joy filled that place! This was our time to celebrate! The evening continued with a live auction, a banquet, and night of funky dancing.

The days were filled with insightful workshops, captivating keynote addresses, and rousing worship. The five-day assembly was held on the campus of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, an RIC institution of the ELCA; and our

worship and plenary sessions took place in the school's worship space, Hoversten Chapel. From our first gathering at the celebratory opening worship to the closing Jazz Communion, the joy and hope of the assembly participants were palpable. *Let Justice Roll* was my first RIC conference, or any ELCA function, and it was an exciting introduction to the denomination! I came from a denomination that still does not ordain queer clergy, so this conference was especially significant for me as I begin my last year of seminary. It made me proud to be a part of the ELCA and excited about the future of the denomination.

In the midst of the assembly's elation, we were reminded of the work still looming for LC/NA. The policy change at last year's Churchwide Assembly is the culmination of many years' work, but it was a milestone, and not the ultimate goal of LC/NA. The evening of the banquet, Ross Murray, the Deputy Director of LC/NA reminded the conference of the work still ahead; we are called to: Expand and deepen Reconciling in Christ, put policy into practice, and create a change in the world.

First, the Reconciling in Christ program was the primary factor contributing to the policy change in the denomination. Currently 454 RIC settings exist across North America, which is fantastic, but it is still a small percentage compared to the 10,000 congregations in the ELCA. Non-church members might hear of the policy change in the denomination

and expect the first Lutheran church they find to be welcoming; the more RIC churches we have, the more the policy will be felt by a broader range of people.

Second, policy does not mean much if it is just policy; it needs to be put into practice at all levels of the ELCA. The denomination needs strong leaders at every level who can imagine how the ministries of the church can reach out to those on the margins and bring them into the center. It's important for justice minded people to be aware of how their congregation and synod are organized, and to help foster positive implementations of denominational policy.

Third, we are called to create change in the world; justice within our churches means nothing until there is justice in the wider world. RIC organizations must speak out as Lutheran voices in the face of marriage rights, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and other areas of justice for sexual minorities. With all the religious voices opposed to God's justice, our own Lutheran cries for justice must be heard.

In all those areas, we were reminded of four things that are essential to our movement: graceful engagement, faithful references to scripture, one-on-one conversations, and making sure our stories are heard. Amos reminds us not to rely on our solemn festivals, or our own goodness, but to let justice flow from all of us like waters. May it be so, both in our denomination and the world.

◀ “Summit” continued from page 6

though, were the connections made between Lutherans in different areas and of different levels of experience, and also connections to the other faith-based LGBT movements in so many denominations. The time for networking, unfortunately, was limited.

Coming out of the Summit, Ross Murray, Deputy Director of LC/NA, reiterated the themes of which he spoke at the LC/NA Assembly banquet (see article on this page for the three themes). With all the success of last year's Churchwide Assembly, it is clear that our work is far from over.

New Website Under Construction

In the upcoming weeks, we will be transforming our website to look and feel more like *Advent*, as well as including a calendar of events, more photos and videos of LC/SF-BA activities, and an opportunity to sign up for the e-mail version of *Advent*.

Visit: <http://www.lcsanfrancisco.org>

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