

## **A Response to the Actions of the ELCA 2009 Churchwide Assembly by the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America**

During the Reformation of Christ's Church in the 1500s, those who came to be known as Lutherans sought to establish all they did and taught in two ways, so as to prove that their contentions were good and right. First and foremost, all that was set in place or rejected must be in conformity with God's holy Word. Second, the history of Christ's Church was consulted to demonstrate that what was being said or done was not some novel twisting of that Word (2 Peter 1:20). The actions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at its Churchwide Assembly this past week in Minneapolis completely set this fundamental principle of the Reformation on its head: it has acted contrary to God's Word and contrary to how that Word has been understood by the whole Church throughout the ages.

Both with regard to its social statement on homosexuality and to its declaration of fellowship with the United Methodist Church, the ELCA has rejected God's clear Word and embraced sin and false doctrine as if it were pleasing to God—or even *necessary* to His 'justice' (as defined by men apart from His Word). Instead of loving homosexuals enough to call them to repent of their sin and to offer God's grace in Christ for forgiveness—as well as provide the help of the Church to the individual homosexual in struggling against his or her sin (as one would do with other sins, such as alcoholism or drug addiction)—the ELCA has taken the easy way out by lying to those caught in this sin, making it seem as if God's Word no longer speaks clearly. Just as this leaves the Bible open to being discarded whenever its truth offends a practitioner of whatever sin, it has the additional ill effect of making *all* of the Bible untrustworthy, including those sections that speak to its unique and overarching message: the forgiveness of every sin through the perfect life and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, this pattern has been well set within the ELCA from its inception. The ELCA's rejection of the absolute authority of Holy Scripture (inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility) has been shown again and again—by its rejection of the Bible's limiting the pastoral office to men, by its refusal to keep pure the chief article of the Church (that man is saved solely by the grace of God through faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ alone) as was shown by its signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (wherein they gave up all standing as a Reformation church body by compromising that chief article of the faith with the false teaching of the Roman Church), and by its entering into 'full communion' agreements with church bodies that completely contradict the scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper that is upheld by the Lutheran Confessions (namely, that the

bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus, given for Christians who are united in the true faith to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins). The approval of full communion with the United Methodist Church—like the previous approvals of fellowship with the Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church U.S.A, the Moravian Brethren, the Episcopal Church U.S.A, and the United Church of Christ—is but another instance of the desire for external unity at any cost overriding the pure teaching of God's Word.

It is the prayer of all in our diocese that those in the ELCA who confessed their consciences bound to the Word of God and unable to continue in a church body that has so dramatically thrown aside that Word will have had their voices heard by those who were in favor of these rejections of God's Word. May the Holy Spirit use their confession to bring their church body to true repentance for these and other previous sinful actions. Indeed, we pray that God the Holy and Blessed Trinity, in His mercy, would either lead the ELCA to re-embrace the foundation of Christianity in every way, or bring those who still confess the truth to a new home where they may be served in accord with God's will, and that those who have been hardened in their errors through these sinful actions would yet hear both the Law and the Gospel of the Lord so that they are not eternally lost through the impenitence that has been encouraged in them. At the same time, we pray that those Lutheran bodies that have effectively 'winked at' the corporate sins of the ELCA by continuing to participate with them in various joint endeavors (including an aberrant Ministry of Gospel and Sacrament to those in the Armed Forces) would finally repent of their enabling of the progress of such false doctrine and practice.

With the unanimous consent of the diocese,

The Rt. Rev. James D. Heiser, Bishop