

Address to Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina  
Rev. Robert T. Byrne  
November 10, 2009

Where are you? I believe in the last couple of minutes we got some clarity on where "Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina" finds itself. But where are you in the midst of what Michael Root described to many of us on September 17<sup>th</sup> as an "unmitigated disaster"; his description of the decisions or non decisions made at the Churchwide Assembly in August. Since you are here I will assume that you have some interest in this group; for now a group of clergy who in and of our ourselves believe we have the right or straight way to think about the canonical scriptures of the old and new testaments as seen through the lenses of the confessions. This is a group that calls itself orthodox not as a badge of biblical purity or intellectual acuity; but rather as a statement of humility to the accepted or traditional and historic view of scripture. That being said the question remains; where are you? There is no right answer to that question. There is no answer that fits all of the orthodox present. This is because the answer lies in where the spirit is taking your local congregation. What you are confronted with as through the power of the holy spirit your congregation now wrestles is how to identify and lead people in various stages of anxiety over what is the largest question many of us will face in our ministries. Your answer may be received through prayer and openness to search for your theological center as never before. your answer may be received through prayer and re-examination of your own sense of faithfulness to ordination vows; which by the way are the things to which you and i will have to give account to god. Your answer may be likely different from the person sitting next to you. Your answer is likely continuously redefined within a perceived direction. For Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina the direction is clear. We uphold the historic teachings of scripture. We claim to uphold them with regard to the questions at hand in Human Sexuality Gift and Trust. We claim to uphold them as they address the issues of marriage and the expectations for clergy conduct; ie Visions and Expectations 1990 vintage. And I pray we will claim and uphold them with regard to all the questions that are addressed by scripture. Allow me one aside.

If what binds us together is this orthodox view in the midst of our local situations then let us be bound and make covenant with each other that our passionate orthodoxy with scripture is pervasive in all we do as ordained pastors. You see the issue is not homosexuality or behavior within that sexual orientation. That is merely the presenting symptom. The issue is that we god forgive us have taken the "canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative norm of its proclamation , faith and life" as a constitutional statement to gather dust in the midst of parish clergy pragmatism. When we hear proponents of a view with which we disagree give example after scriptural example of passages that in their view have been ignored or dismissed to compromise with the tide of accepted norms outside the church; when they point to those and challenge us as to why the church or this group now has decided it's time to be orthodox when we talk about gay union; what is our response? I believe it begins with a confession that we need to be more faithful to the entirety of scripture. I believe it begins when we say, "You have a point; but the consequence is not to venture into the abyss of heresy!" The consequence is to repent and renew our walk in a new direction. What we are called to in this time is a renewal to live out and live under, and preach about, and teach under that which we profess as authoritative. This means not only those passages that make us feel eloquent or comfortable; but rather this calls us to deal with and wrestle with and be convicted by those passages that make a week off from the parish when they come up in the lectionary a highly desirable option. We must be orthodox about those passages we avoid in bible studies and side step in conversations. If anything good may come about in the years that our struggle will entail let this be the

good. We need to re engage fully and live the example of leadership to our people with that which we claim to be orthodox. So much for my aside.

I still have yet to deal with where you are? With humility to acknowledge that my local situation is not yours and my response is not necessarily appropriate for you may I share how we are attempting to wrestle at St. Paul, Aiken. Perhaps my answer to the question may be an aid to yours. I have a view of ministry that says we are called to serve God in parish settings as our gifts and talents from God match out as best they can the needs and directions of the local setting. This means I serve the local setting at the beginning of a call and continue in that service as long as the Holy Spirit calls and validates the match. It is a discernment process that remains always in the present imperative. This view is foundational to my service of St. Paul Aiken in light of the Churchwide decisions and dealing with them. My answer to the question "Where are you?" Is better answered in how you are helping your congregations through a responsive process. It is not, "Where are you leading the congregation to respond based on your own view.? Once a congregation finishes its process than a pastor may discern the continuing validity of his/her call to the redefined setting.

Before worship on August 23<sup>rd</sup> and after I was aware of the Churchwide decisions I had decided the right approach was simply to remind people that we had not changed because of churchwide; that their pastor had not changed; and that we would continue on while we prayed for those leaders who had now to deal with implementing the new decisions of the ELCA. That approach exploded in my face at the conclusion of the 8:30 worship service. The first couple whose hand I shook, who seldom said much other than have a nice day asked me how i could let such a thing happen. They were soon followed by the parents of the largest young family in the congregation who informed me they could not stay part of a church that would teach such things to their children. It got no better with other folks. It got no better after 11:00 am worship. Before Sunday was over I was convinced that a pastoral letter was in order. The letter along with a letter from our Bishop in South Carolina and the presiding Bishop of the ELCA eventually went out and framed my commitment to the process. My pastoral letter stated that we needed a time of research and discernment. Then after this time I said,

*"It will be up to this congregation initially through the council and perhaps ultimately at a congregational meeting to determine which of the three (now five) or which variation of the options will be the response of St. Paul Lutheran Church. My concern as your spiritual leader in this time is to foster a process that will lead us faithfully to respond and to continue our ministry here as the Holy Spirit leads us in light of the latest Churchwide Assembly actions on sexuality."*

After many subsequent meetings; after traveling to the CORE gathering in Indianapolis; after attending the Society of the Holy Trinity annual retreat outside of Chicago and subsequently subscribing to their rule and after much consultation with pastors across the ELCA the time is at hand for us. With the support of our council a called congregational meeting will take place at St. Paul Aiken on November 15<sup>th</sup>; this Sunday. The congregation will have before it options to define its response to the Churchwide decisions. We will determine the local congregational option for St. Paul, Aiken by voting to change continuing resolutions and in so doing by subsequently changing our bylaws. The options for the congregation define their local option. The risk for the pastor is that the newly defined community is one that he/she may no longer serve.

## POWER POINT PRESENTATION

### Option A

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina welcomes all people into it's community of faith regardless of sexual orientation and

Be it resolved that the congregation accepts the ambiguity of understandings on same sex couples as stated in the ELCA Social Statement "Human Sexuality Gift and Trust" and agrees to live as a congregation respectful of differing views within the congregation and in the midst of that ambiguity and

Be it resolved that the congregation directs ordained rostered leaders to support same sex couples as he/she sees being appropriate and consistent with the social statement and their own sense of faithfulness to their vows

Be it resolved that the congregation directs rostered leaders to teach consistent with the with the social statement and their own sense of faithfulness to their vows .

#### Option One

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina welcomes all people into its community of faith regardless of sexual orientation and

Be it resolved that to be fully welcoming and to respect the bound consciences of brothers or sisters in same gender relationships St. Paul Lutheran Church directs its ordained rostered leaders to bless those unions that are intended as life long, monogamous and publically accountable as understood in the ELCA in an appropriate liturgical rite as outlined in a revised CR.8.6 and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church is open to issuing Calls to rostered leaders of the ELCA who live in faithful same gender relationships that have been blessed as life long, monogamous and publically accountable.

#### Option Two

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina welcomes all people into its community of faith regardless of sexual orientation and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church change its continuing resolutions to add CR 8.10.1 with regards to the blessing of a homosexual relationship and faithfulness in heterosexual relationships and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church change its continuing resolutions to add CR 8.10.2 with regards to Visions and Expectations 1990 for Pastors and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church change its continuing resolutions to add CR 8..10.3 with regard to its teachings in the area of homosexual behavior.

#### CR 8.10.1

##### 1993 STATEMENT OF ELCA CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS ACCEPTED

1. This congregation receives the pastoral guidance of the 1993 Statement of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, that "there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship." However, pastors within their local contexts are to "provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister."
2. Only a pastor who subscribes to and lives according to the November 23, 1990 document, *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, which calls pastors to faithfulness in marriage and chastity in singleness, shall be eligible to be called as a pastor of this

congregation. The Christian tradition defines marriage as a covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman and chastity in singleness as abstinence from sexual activity, heterosexual or homosexual. Only a pastor who preaches, teaches, and lives according to these understandings shall be eligible to be called as a pastor of this congregation.

#### CR 8.10.2

##### PASTORS ASSENT TO "VISIONS AND EXPECTATIONS 1990

Every pastor shall lead by personal example in the use of the means of grace, in faithful service, and holy living. Every pastor shall subscribe to *Visions and Expectations* of 1990. Christian marriage is the union of one man and one woman blessed by God and recognized by the state. Married pastors shall be faithful to the spouse and unmarried pastors shall be abstinent.

#### CR 8.10.3

This congregation resolves and shall teach in accordance with the following:

According to the Scriptures, homosexual behavior is sinful. In this we follow the statement of ELCA predecessor body, the American Lutheran Church, in its statement "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior" (1980): *"This church regards the practice of homosexual erotic behavior as contrary to God's intent for his children. It rejects the contention that homosexual behavior is simply another form of sexual behavior equally valid with the dominant male/female pattern. We have reviewed the challenges to the traditional interpretations of those scripture passages that appear to proscribe homosexual behavior. We are not convinced by the evidence presented. Among passages cited as requiring interpretations different from the traditional interpretation are Genesis 18:16-19:29; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10."*

#### Option Three

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina welcomes all people into its community of faith regardless of sexual orientation and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church desires to speak the transforming truth of God in association with other like minded congregations in the ELCA in order to reform the ELCA from the error of the Churchwide decisions and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina accepts the statement of faith of Lutheran CORE and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran church will join Lutheran CORE in order to give witness with other members of Lutheran CORE to the transforming truth of God and for as long as such an association continues to serve that purpose.

#### Option Four

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church of Aiken, South Carolina welcomes all people into its community of faith regardless of sexual orientation and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church regards the actions of the Churchwide assembly to place the ELCA in a condition of heresy to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church regards the actions of the Churchwide assembly to place the ELCA in violation of C 2.03 of its own constitution and

Be it resolved that St. Paul Lutheran Church as a matter of bound conscience shall therefore initiate the process of terminating its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under section C 6.05 in order to affiliate with another Lutheran church body under section C7.03 of its constitution.

We will vote on November 15<sup>TH</sup>. I believe that the process faithfully conducted will lead St. Paul where they need to be to share the good news of Jesus Christ. This is where I am in my local situation and within my own sense of call at St. Paul Aiken. I shared it with you in the hope that you might find something helpful. I share it with you in the humble reality that your situation may call for a totally different approach. You may take my approach locally and stay in the ELCA, stay in the ELCA and join Lutheran CORE or begin the process to leave the ELCA. Your local situation will drive where you are in the process of response. Your process faithful to trusting in the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit is what is crucial.

I believe that Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina exists to take our local processes to the next level. We exist partially to insist that the South Carolina Synod demonstrate the same trust in the Holy Spirit at the synodical level that each pastor will at the parish level. We exist to affirm that orthodoxy in scriptural understandings is more than local. We exist to assert it at the synodical level. We are united in our view of the importance of maintaining the orthodox view of scripture particularly in South Carolina and in the Church. Regardless of our local situation this is the sense of calling and responsibility that unites all who join Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina.

We believe that this is a time in the life of the Lutheran Church where we must literally step forward and participate in the continuing reformation of the church by calling it back from the precipice of heresy. That begins in this synod. That begins as our synod trusts the Holy Spirit with a vote on our synodical options. Though this synod voted a sense of the synod resolution last June in favor of our position relative to then the proposed Social Statement, it had no impact on the life of our synod. Now is the time to trust the Spirit in a vote that will define the life of the South Carolina Synod for years to come. Now is the time to trust the Spirit in a vote that will let the light of reformation shine from South Carolina and other like minded synods to the rest of the ELCA. Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina are called to present the apology for historical and biblical orthodoxy. We are called to present this apology in all matters beginning with our synodical response to the options given in "Human Sexuality Gift & Trust.

This will not be an easy task. This will in fact be a difficult task. This may quickly move from cum bai yah to hardball. This will at times feel like a political undertaking. Though it may be political in methodology; we are in the world; let's be clear that we undertake this task; this calling because we feel a calling of the Holy Spirit; for we are of our responsibility to be faithful to ordination vows. We are of our callings to be faithful to the Church that has been given to our care in this day so that we might as stewards of this treasure hand it on to those who will follow us. This is not a short term task. It will be a task that may be defined in multiples of years. Look at the history of the Church if you think that last statement is exaggerated. This will not be a popular task. I believe if ever the church is experienced as counter cultural this is the task that will bring you face to face with counter cultural consequences on a personal level.

Yet for me there is really no choice in the matter. I know we are brought together by the Holy Spirit in this group, Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina because for you there is also no choice in the matter. As baptized brothers and sisters; as disciples of Jesus Christ ; as fallen yet faithful people who must live first and then because of our calling from God must preach, teach and administer the

sacraments; that is we must lead as servants bound under the authority of the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, we can do no other; so help us God. AMEN