

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

November 2008

Signers to Open Letter on sexuality draft top 1,200

More than 1,200 ELCA lay members and pastors have added their names to the Open Letter calling for major revisions to the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* being considered by the ELCA.

The Open Letter and the list of signers were sent to the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, ELCA Church Council, and ELCA Conference of Bishops as a response to the draft social statement.

“We are very pleased with the significant response to the Open

Letter. We hope to grow a much longer list of signatures,” said the Rev. Paull Spring, chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“We pray that the Task Force will take seriously the concerns and suggestions expressed in the Open Letter and in the reviews submitted by many faithful church members and that they will be clearly represented in the next draft of the social statement.”

The Open Letter was originally signed by the 11 members of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee

and the 18 members of the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council.

ELCA members are invited to add their names to this Open Letter as a part of their response to the sexuality draft social statement. The list of additional signers is posted online at www.lutherancore.org.

Links to detailed reviews of the draft statement and to other helpful documents on human sexuality are available at www.lutherancore.org in the marriage and family educational resources section.

What's next for the ELCA sexuality social statement?

The deadline for responses to the ELCA's *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* was Nov. 1. However, ELCA members still have two opportunities to shape the social statement that will be considered by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality will meet Nov. 7-8 to review responses to the draft statement and to consider changes to the document. They will provide a report to the ELCA Church Council's Nov. 14-17 meeting.

On Thursday, Feb. 19, the Task Force will release its proposed text of an ELCA social statement on human sexuality and its recommendations on whether the ELCA should change its teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in

same-sex sexual relationships.

The ELCA Church Council will decide the form of the proposals that will be considered by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and may edit the proposed social statement and other Task Force recommendations.

Synod Councils may respond to the Task Force recommendations and offer advice to the ELCA Church Council through resolutions prior to the council's March 27-29 meeting.

ELCA members are encouraged to communicate with their synod council members and synod bishop about the revised social statement draft and about whether the ELCA should change its teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual

relationships.

On Thursday, April 2, the version of the social statement text recommended by the ELCA Church Council will be released online. The Church Council's recommendations on whether the ELCA should change its teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships will also be released that day.

ELCA Synod Assemblies have the opportunity to respond to the Church Council's recommended social statement text and its recommendations regarding whether the ELCA should change its teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships through memorials and resolutions.

'God's Word or Ours?' - Call to Faithfulness conference

By Pastor Ken Kimball

"God's Word or Ours?" a two-day conference Sept 28-29 drew upward of 125 ELCA lay and clergy from five states (Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Illinois, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) to Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Call to Faithfulness, a reform group centered in the Northeast Iowa Synod, organized the event. Call to Faithfulness is one of the member organizations of Lutheran CORE.

Keynote presenter, Dr. Robert Benne, Director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College in Salem, Va., drew upon his own theological and vocational journey as an ethicist in recounting how the ELCA has reached the predicament in which classical (i.e. traditional-orthodox) Lutheranism and Lutherans are marginalized while revisionist ideology and ideologues have come to dominate the leadership and structures of the ELCA.

Following a trajectory that began to emerge in its predecessor bodies (ALC, LCA) during the 1960's, much of the ELCA's leadership has chosen liberal Protestantism and its utopian Kingdom of God paradigm over the classical Lutheran understanding of the church and her reason for existence. The church as agent and tool for social change trumps church as sinners gathered around Word and Sacrament. Traditional-orthodox piety and terminology are either viewed with suspicion and disdainfully dismissed as irrelevant or interpreted in ways antithetical to their original use and meaning.

Dr. Benne's prescription did not include breaking away and formation

of a new church body but rather for congregations to draw upon and strengthen their confessional identity (Lutheran distinctives) and for the growth of reform groups and associations. In particular, he expressed his hopes for Lutheran CORE to serve as a connection and central organizing point for classical Lutheran congregations and groups, essentially operating as the church within the ELCA, particularly where ELCA churchwide and synodical leadership has failed or refuses to provide confessionally and Biblically faithful leadership and support.

The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Menomonie, Wis., led a presentation on the ELCA's Book of Faith Initiative. He concluded that "It's okay." That is not a ringing endorsement of everything that comes out under the Book of Faith banner or product-line but a carefully considered view of the initiative as a neutral tool, the effect of which will depend on who uses the tool and how.

Dr. Harrisville encouraged traditional-orthodox ELCA Lutherans to see the Book of Faith initiative as an opportunity to be seized and used. The Bible and the reading of it by ELCA Lutherans favors the traditional-orthodox. He urged us to be proactive and critical in approaching the support materials put out by Augsburg Fortress. But he gave us hope as well of the level of input to date by traditional-orthodox Lutheran scholars, himself included. In the end, the key focus must be on the reading of Scripture itself.

The Rev. Steven King, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Maple Lake, Minn., presented "Resources for

Reform." He shared and reviewed resources for women's Bible studies and catechism instruction from Sola Publishing. Pastor King also serves as director of education for Sola Publishing and the WordAlone Network, one of the member organizations of Lutheran CORE.

The Rev. Erma Wolf, pastor of the Brandon-Split Rock Lutheran Parish in Brandon, S.D. and vice-chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, gave an overview of the Lutheran Coalition for Reform: its basic principles and strategic focus. She also provided an update on what the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee has been working on recently.

A "confessional caucus" of 20 or so synodical reform leaders was held over lunch on Sept. 29 in hopes of mutual encouragement and establishing and strengthening connections between colleagues in reform (especially as some are in synods where they are very isolated and beleaguered). Among the synods represented at this caucus were Northeast Iowa, Northern Illinois, Central/Southern Illinois, Southeast Iowa, Western Iowa, Nebraska, and Southwest Minnesota. The hour's time was quickly exhausted by persons introducing themselves and sharing briefly on the situation in their synod.

A five-CD set of recordings of the presentations at the conference is now available. Each set contains the major presentations and the closing panel discussion. If you would like a set of CDs, please send your mailing address and a check for \$7.50 payable to Call to Faithfulness to: Call to Faithfulness, c/o Pastor Gary Hatcher, PO Box 638, Greene, IA 50636.

Braaten notes theological issues challenging the ELCA

Following are excerpts of an address given by Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten Oct. 14 at a forum sponsored by Lutheran CORE at La Casa De Cristo Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Ariz. The entire address is available at www.lutherancore.org.

✚ People in the ELCA are riled up about sex. And it's not because they wanted to be. This was not the topic of their choice. It's been foisted on them from above. And they are worried about how the lengthy process of discussion and deliberation will end.

The Deep Underlying Problem

✚ The theological issues troubling the ELCA were looming large long before the ELCA took up Hollywood's favorite topic as its chief preoccupation. The underlying theological problem in the ELCA is much deeper than sex. The lack of consensus in the church on the ethics of sex is epiphenomenal, that is, it is a secondary complication of a much deeper condition that the ELCA shares with all other mainline Protestant churches.

✚ Christianity is like a bucket brigade. It is something handed down from generation to generation. Each generation of believers must take responsibility to pass on the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The cumulative result of churches doing that for 2,000 years is the mainstream of the Christian tradition. That's where we want to situate ourselves. We have received that tradition, founded on the Bible, and it is our turn now to pass it on to our children and grandchildren without abbreviation, without compromise, and without tailoring it

to suit our own whims and fancies. In other words, we are called to be faithful. But today something of a paradigm shift is occurring in American Lutheranism, such that the church we are passing on to our children is vastly different from the church we received from our fathers and mothers in the faith.

✚ Of course the church must change since it lives in history. Nothing remains exactly the same. The church must change in order to remain the same. But some changes are good and some are not, and that is what the controversy in the church is all about. We must discern the spirits. Not everything is up for grabs. We have sound criteria to tell what kinds of change are good for the gospel and what are not. We do have an agenda faithful to our confessional Lutheran tradition, a tradition that claims to be true to the classical teachings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, standing firmly on the pillars of Holy Scripture and the orthodox Creeds.

✚ Our central concern is theological, what we believe about the triune God, salvation through Christ alone, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, true preaching of the Word and faithful administration of the Sacraments.

The Pervasive Issues and Isms

✚ The ELCA Constitution and Confession of Faith are just fine. We have no quarrel with them. But they are often treated as just a piece of paper. Even some bishops ignore them. We know the rules of the game, but there is no penalty for ignoring them, and no discipline, no accountability. That's the end-product

of rampant individualism, again the hallmark of ancient and modern gnosticism.

✚ Let me give you a laundry list of the hot button isms shaking the foundations: The first is the doctrine of the Triune God and the challenge of radical theological feminism.

✚ The second major issue challenging the ELCA and other churches, again a symptom of the disease we have called gnosticism, is the uniqueness of Christ and the challenge of radical religious pluralism. From the start Christianity entered a world of many religions, but not one of the apostles believed that they are all equally valid as ways of salvation. But that is exactly what the Protestant gnostics of today are teaching in the name of the pluralistic theology of religion.

✚ The third critical issue has to do with the authority of the Bible and the challenge of historical relativism. Another name for it is reader-response hermeneutics. Truth is in the eye of the beholder. You italicize the words of Scripture that turn you on, and chalk all the rest up to the primitive notions of an ancient Semitic people. The Bible becomes a wax nose, so much putty in the hands of the artist who makes it conform to the culture of modernity.

✚ The fourth issue is of concern to every pastor, the absolute gospel and the challenge of American religion, the neo-pagan gnosticism infiltrating the practices of worship. Religion sells when it can satisfy the search for self-fulfillment. Gnosticism is all about the self; it appeals to the sovereign autonomous self. It's all about me. The churches that grow best in a mass culture engage in

Braaten: 'The reformation of the church must continue'

Continued from Page 3

Christianity-Lite, throwing overboard all the excess baggage like traditional dogmas, liturgies, hymnody, and moral codes of conduct. Success is quantifiable in terms of numbers — members, budgets, buildings, and programs.

... American religion is a consumer's delight; it can be altered and tailored to meet the taste of the individual consumers. Traditional creeds, ceremonies, symbols, sacraments, and practices are set aside for the immediacy of experience, leaving our people adrift in a narcissistic culture of decadence and death. The bottom line of American religion is all about what I feel.

✚ The fifth issue is about the Church as a divine institution and the challenge of the democratic cult of egalitarianism. . . . The church is not a democracy. It is not "of the people and by the people." It is of God! Christ is king, the Lord of the church.

✚ The sixth issue has to do with ecumenism and the challenge of modern Protestantism. . . . There is no consensus in the ELCA on any of the ecumenical agreements we have reached with other churches.

✚ As a Lutheran I am unapologetically an ecumenical theologian. But there are limits to unity. We cannot be for church unity at all costs. There are sects with which we cannot be in altar and pulpit fellowship. Where there is heresy and apostasy in the church, that calls for separation. There is one thing worse than schism, and that is commingling with idolaters and blasphemers. It has come to that at previous times in church history. . . . We in the ELCA

have not reached such a point, but let there be no mistake about this. It could happen here and there in American Christianity, triggering a kind of realignment of churches that some are already calling for.

✚ The seventh issue has to do with the integrity of the church and the challenge of confusing the law and the gospel of God, of failing to make the proper distinction between law and gospel.

Where Do We Go From Here?

✚ As in the case of Katrina, the traditional levees that kept Lutheranism from conforming to the surrounding culture of American religion no longer hold. They are broken.

✚ I am not in favor of shopping around for another church. It is a romantic notion to think that there is a more perfect church out there. Every one has its own share of problems.

✚ Our situation is not altogether bleak and hopeless. Thousands of pastors and congregations are doing things just about right. Many reform-minded confessors are doing ministry faithful to the common core of evangelical faith and orthodox doctrine. We have the Bible; it is the Word of God. Who knows what will happen when we take the initiative to actually read it?

✚ *Ecclesia semper reformanda!* That is a Latin slogan of our Lutheran tradition. The reformation of the church must continue. When the church finds itself living in the dark ages, as it is today, we trust that God will create movements for renewal

and reform, as he has always done in the past. We have his promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. We must understand that we are back into the raw missionary situation of New Testament Christianity, one in which true Christian faith cannot count on its cultural plausibility in a neopagan environment.

✚ The only thing that matters in true Christian worship is the presence of the living God through the audible words of preaching according to the Scriptures and the visible words of Holy Communion according to our Lord's institution.

✚ The church should always be in the business of reaching out to add new members, of course, but more importantly today it needs to re-evangelize the members it already has, to make clear its difference from the world, stressing that the Christian faith is utterly unique and fundamentally different from other religions and ideologies, and that what she has to offer the world cannot be provided by any other agency or community in the world. To pray and work for a new reformation is not to wait for things to happen elsewhere than in each of our local congregations. That is where the action is. Don't think it is in Chicago or Rome or Geneva. We meet Christ at home in our local parish, not in the church bureaucracy that we create to do some of the things we cannot do on our own. Every ordinary congregation is endowed with an extraordinary message. It is a message of the dying and rising of Jesus and that all who believe in him share in the salvation he brings. What more do we want? What more do we need?

Lutheran Church of Norway rejects same-sex marriages

The Council of Bishops of the Lutheran Church of Norway decided in October that Lutheran pastors may not preside at weddings for same-sex couples or provide blessing services for homosexual relationships.

The bishops said that pastors may pray for same-sex couples but may not bless their relationships. Civil marriage services in churches were also rejected by the bishops.

The Church of Norway — a member of the Lutheran World Federation — is the country's state church and counts 83 percent of Norway's 4.6 million people as church members.

Same-sex civil marriage will be legal in Norway starting in January. The Norwegian parliament voted in June to amend the country's definition of civil marriage to make it gender neutral.

According to the legislation, "Only if and when the liturgy of the Church has been changed, will priests be able to marry lesbian and homosexual couples in the Church of Norway."

In November 2007, the General Synod of the Church of Norway decided that individual bishops may decide whether or not to allow clergy under their supervision in be in same-sex sexual relationships.

30 states affirm traditional marriage in constitutions

Voters in Arizona, California and Florida approved amendments to their state constitutions which define marriage as between a man and a woman in the Nov. 4 elections.

Thirty states now affirm marriage as between a man and a woman in their constitutions. An additional 14 states have state laws affirming traditional marriage.

Constitutional amendments have been seen as the only option for supporters

of traditional marriage given that some courts have imposed same-sex marriage on states with traditional marriage laws.

The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled Oct. 10 that same-sex couples have a right to marry in that state.

May 15 the California Supreme Court overturned a 2000 referendum vote that defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The California Supreme Court was overturned by the voters by the constitutional amendment Nov. 4. The amendment was approved by 52 percent of California voters.

Florida and Arizona approved constitutional amendments Nov. 4 defining marriage as between a man and a woman by 62 percent and 57 percent of voters, respectively.

Massachusetts became the first state to permit same-sex marriages in 2004 when its state Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples have a right to marry. Several states offer same-sex couples rights similar to those offered to married couples, but they do not call those arrangements marriages.

The ELCA teaches that "marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman" (*Sexuality: Some Common Convictions*, 1996 ELCA Message).

In spite of ELCA teaching and policy, some ELCA pastors have presided at same-sex marriages or services of blessing, and some ELCA bishops allow pastors in their synods to do so.

"The constitution and bylaws, as well as related policy documents of the ELCA, do not provide a basis for pastors of this church to officiate at a same-sex marriage," explains ELCA Secretary David Swartling. "Under ELCA policy, marriage is defined as a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman. The Churchwide Assembly has had opportunities to change this policy, both to make it less restrictive and to make it more restrictive. It has declined to do so."

"In light of ELCA policy, pastors, synodically authorized ministers, and congregations may be subject to discipline if they officiate at same-sex marriages and allow them to take place in their buildings," Swartling said.

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE -
Coalition for Reform

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

The Rev. David J. Baer, editor
editor@lutherancore.org

Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

ELCA Sierra Pacific Synod promotes ‘Goddess’ conference

The ELCA Sierra Pacific Synod promoted a “Goddess” conference in one of its official publications.

The synod’s Oct. 23 “Wednesday Three Things” electronic newsletter for clergy and lay leaders included an announcement promoting “Come Now, O Wisdom — Faith and Feminism, Womanist / Mujerista Conference” Nov. 7-9 at “herchurch” in San Francisco.

The synod reported that the purpose of the conference is “To provide opportunity for feminist faith seekers, church leaders, Interfaith leaders, politicians and artists to experience and discuss the urgent implications of God/dess imagery and gender issues which transform the church, the world and our daily lives so that together we seek and speak justice.”

“Keynote speaker will be Carol

Christ, Ph.D. who is the author of the widely reprinted essay, ‘Why Women Need the Goddess,’ which has awakened us to the Sacred Feminine and introduced many to the rebirth of the ancient religion of the Goddess,” the synod newsletter reported.

Carol Christ is the author of several books including *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* and *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*.

“Herchurch” — also known as Ebenezer Lutheran Church — is led by the Rev. Stacy Boorn, an ELCA pastor. Herchurch is one of the most heterodox churches in the ELCA.

The congregation’s website — www.herchurch.org — describes the congregation as an “emerging feminist faith community.” The site includes a rewriting of the Lord’s

Prayer that begins “Our Mother who is within us . . .” The site also sells and promotes a “Goddess Rosary” and reports that “Each morning Pastor Stacy and members of herchurch pray the Goddess Rosary.”

Dr. Mary Streufert, ELCA Director for Justice for Women, is one of the speakers for the conference.

The ELCA will host its own feminist theology conference Jan. 23-24 in Chicago called “Transformative Lutheran Theologies Conference: Feminist, Womanist and Mujerista Perspectives.”

The ELCA website reports that its conference is “Designed to engage church leaders in the transformative theology of women in the academy for the sake of the church, this conference entails both formal papers and dialogical engagement.”

San Francisco Lutherans plan transgender ordination

Former ELCA congregation First United Lutheran Church in San Francisco voted Oct. 19 to call Jay Wilson as pastor. An ordination service is planned for Dec. 6.

The internet site of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries says that “Jay Wilson is a queer and genderqueer transguy, autistic and disabled, who identifies as a Lutheran postmodern, third-wave feminist, academic geek, disability rights activist, and social justice advocate.”

ELM is an organization that “approves” the ordinations of individuals who refuse to abide by the ELCA’s standards for the sexual conduct of pastors. ELM reports that

Wilson was removed from the ELCA candidacy process for reasons of “gender identity and sexual orientation.”

Wilson has a Master of Divinity degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. “While attending Luther Seminary, he co-founded AGAPE, a group for LGBTQ students and allies, and transitioned female-to-male in appearance while living on campus,” ELM reports.

Wilson entered seminary with a female identity as Jamie Wilson but began identifying herself as male. Her 2004 internship — at an ELCA church with a pastor in a same-sex sexual relationship — attracted

attention throughout the ELCA.

First United was one of the first ELCA congregations to call a practicing homosexual as its pastor. The congregation called Jeff Johnson in 1989. Johnson and two lesbian women were ordained in 1990 in the first ordination service held in defiance of ELCA teaching and policy. The congregation was removed from the ELCA in 1995 as a result of that action.

Because First United Lutheran Church is not an ELCA congregation, ELCA policies do not apply to its actions. However, any ELCA clergy participating in the service could be violating standards for ELCA clergy.

Hanson warns bishops to prepare for synod financial crisis

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson warned synod bishops to prepare for congregations to leave their synods or to withhold financial support if the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly votes to change church teaching and policy to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. Bishop Hanson made the comments during the Conference of Bishops' fall meeting Oct. 2-7 in Chicago.

"Bishop Hanson recommended that synods have budgetary contingency plans in the event that the 2009 assembly changes the policy and congregations leave," Bishop

Michael Rinehart of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod reported in an e-mail message to synod pastors and other leaders.

The bishops also began work on their response to the action of the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to "request the Conference of Bishops to enter into discussion and consideration of the matter of the accountability of bishops to the adopted policies, practices, and procedures of the ELCA and to formulate a clear statement of such accountability for consideration and adoption by the 2009 assembly of this church."

This request came, in part, because some synod bishops have refused to enforce ELCA policies including policies regarding pastors in same-sex sexual relationships.

"We continued discussion of our Relational Agreement as a first step in responding to a request from the churchwide assembly regarding how bishops hold one another accountable to the policies of this church," reported Bishop Marie C. Jerge of the Upstate New York Synod.

Among other actions, the Conference of Bishops issued a pastoral letter on the country's current financial crisis.

Lutheran homosexual activists ordain hospital chaplain

Jodi Barry, a woman in a committed same-sex relationship, was ordained Saturday, Oct. 25, at Grace University Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Minneapolis.

The ordination was "authorized" by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, an organization that "approves" the ordinations of individuals who refuse to abide by the ELCA's standards for the sexual conduct of pastors. The ordination marks the first time that ELM has ordained someone without a call from a congregation.

Barry is a graduate of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, a United Church of Christ seminary. She has been a chaplain at Mercy Hospital in Coon Rapids, Minn., for several years. She is also the youth director at Grace University Lutheran Church.

The ELM web site reports that "Jodi is married to the Rev. Dr. Jenny

Mason and both are members of the ELM Roster." Mason was removed from the ELCA clergy roster in 2001.

More than 20 clergy participated in Barry's ordination including some ELCA pastors. The Rev. Daniel A. Garnaas, pastor of Grace University Church and an ELCA pastor, preached for the service. Anita Hill, a lesbian woman who was ordained in 2001 in defiance of ELCA standards, presided at the service. Hill is on the staff of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in St. Paul, Minn.

Barry's ordination was the third unauthorized ordination of a person who refused to abide by the ELCA's expectations for ordained ministers this year. ELM reports that there have been 15 unauthorized ordinations in the ELCA's 20-year history.

The participants in these ordinations have acted in ways that violate the

ELCA constitution. The ELCA constitution states that "Ordained ministers shall be subject to discipline for . . . willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church" (20.21.01).

None of the people ordained in these services was approved for ordination in accordance with the standards and process outlined in the ELCA constitution (7.31.13). Each of them refuses to abide by ELCA standards.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries reports that it "credentials and rosters qualified candidates of all sexual orientations and gender identities for ministry." Its web site reports 38 "rostered clergy," four people "approved for call," and three seminarians.

Some ELM-rostered clergy are serving as pastors in ELCA congregations in violation of ELCA constitutional standards.

Dioceses leave Episcopal Church, join Anglican province

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh voted Oct. 4, to become the second diocese to leave The Episcopal Church. Two more dioceses are expected to ratify votes to leave the denomination in November.

The dioceses are amending their constitutions to affiliate with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone in South America until an alternative Anglican province is formed in North America.

The Diocese of Quincy in west central Illinois will meet Nov. 7-8 and the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas, will meet Nov. 14-15 to decide whether to ratify last year's votes to leave The Episcopal Church.

On Dec. 8, 2007, the Diocese of San Joaquin in central California voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with the Province of the Southern Cone. Only five of its churches chose to remain aligned with The Episcopal Church.

Lay delegates to the Pittsburgh Diocese convention voted 119-69 in favor of the new alignment. Clergy approved it 121-33. Three-fourths of the diocese's 74 congregations are expected to remain in the diocese. Nineteen congregations have decided to keep their affiliation with The Episcopal Church.

"We deeply value our shared heritage and years of friendship with those still within that denomination, but this diocese could not in good conscience continue down the road away from mainstream Christianity that the leadership of The Episcopal Church is so determined to follow," said the Rev. Peter Frank, director of communications for the Pittsburgh diocese.

"We are deeply thankful to the Province of the Southern Cone for offering us a clear way to stay within The Anglican Communion as the necessary work of building a new province goes forward. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Christians of many denominations and traditions both here in Pittsburgh and around the world that have prayed for us, encouraged us and stood with us as we have made this decision," he said.

Bishop Jack Leo Iker wrote to members of the Diocese of Fort Worth noting "Ten Reasons Why Now Is the Time to Realign." "This is God's time — our kairos moment — and it has been coming for a long time. We believe that God the Holy Spirit has guided and directed us to this particular time and moment of decision. . . . We have explored every avenue and exhausted every possibility. Now is the time to decide to separate from the moral, spiritual, and numerical decline of TEC."

"This decision is about the truth of the Gospel and upholding the authority of the Holy Scriptures. . . . Many leaders of TEC are teaching a false Gospel and leading people astray. Now is the time for us to take a bold, public stand for the biblical faith and practice of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," wrote Bishop Iker.

The Episcopal Church has taken a hostile stance toward departing dioceses and congregations. The denomination has filed lawsuits to try to claim church property.

"By initiating lawsuits against those who for conscience sake know they must leave an unfaithful Church — lawsuits, by the way, that Primates of

the worldwide Anglican Communion begged be dropped — leaders of The Episcopal Church have instead chosen to intensify their legal efforts to gain control over property and money. Such material things are not essential, but they are helpful tools," said Bishop John-David Schofield of the Anglican Diocese of San Joaquin.

Episcopal church leaders took action Oct. 17 against San Joaquin diocese clergy "to inhibit the 52 clergy unless they recant and return to The Episcopal Church within six months."

Anglican leaders responded by noting that "The Episcopal Church no longer has any jurisdiction over the Anglican Clergy of the Diocese of San Joaquin, and any actions taken by The Episcopal Church concerning their ecclesiastical status within the worldwide Anglican Communion is of no force or effect."

The Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori charged Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan with "abandoning the Communion of the Church." The "deposition" states that effective Sept. 20, "Bishop Duncan shall be deprived of the right to exercise the gifts and spiritual authority of God's word and sacraments conferred at ordination in this Church."

Bishop Duncan, who led the Diocese of Pittsburgh for 11 years, was received as a bishop of the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone prior to the deposition. Southern Cone Archbishop Gregory Venables appointed Bishop Duncan to be the Southern Cone's "commissary" in the diocese. Bishop Duncan is expected to again be elected as bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh Nov. 7.