

## A WORD FROM THE PASTOR



# *Yesterday, Today and Forever*

Every two years the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) meets to conduct business. This meeting is called Churchwide Assembly. This year's Churchwide Assembly is August 17-23 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. If you are interested, you can watch the sessions live at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).

Each of the 65 synods of the ELCA provides a delegation of voting members who were selected at their own Synod Assemblies. These voting members include bishops, pastors and lay leaders.

There is much business to be accomplished at Churchwide Assembly this year. Action will be taken on such matters as Full Communion with the United Methodist Church; a proposed Social Statement on Justice for Women; Funding of the HIV and AIDS Strategy; the Lutheran Malaria Initiative; the 2010-2011 Budget Proposal and the proposed Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust."

But the action that will receive the most attention is the "Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality." This is the recommendation that suggests that individual congregations should be empowered to decide for themselves whether or not they are open to calling a pastor who is in a mutually chaste homosexual relationship.

Our congregation, our synod and our denomination is not of one mind on this issue. At First Lutheran and the Northern Illinois Synod, recorded votes show that 60% agree while 40% disagree with this issue. When you realize that both sides have Biblical and theological points that are faithful and measured, you can see how we are divided on this issue.

No matter how the vote comes out, there will be a variety of voices that will speak out. One of those voices will be the press. The press will run a story that includes words

like sex, religion and pastors. Don't forget such articles are designed to sell papers. One of those voices will be angry clergy. Depending on how the vote comes out, either the far right or the far left will be denouncing the ELCA. One of those voices will be other Christian traditions. Other denominations will announce the ELCA has gone too far or not far enough. While I believe we have much to learn from those voices, I urge all of us to keep those opinions in perspective.

Permit me to share my voice on this vote. After the vote is taken, regardless of the outcome, I will remain at my post. Perhaps I will be writing a sermon, visiting a member in the hospital or teaching a class. While I don't know what ministry task will demand my attention that day, rest assured I will be found serving God's call at First Lutheran to the best of my abilities the morning after the vote.

Please don't misunderstand me. It's not that this vote isn't important. Not at all, this is a historical vote with far reaching implications no matter the outcome. It's not that the variety of deeply held beliefs and the diversity of feelings that our own membership holds is unimportant to me. It profoundly upsets me when God's people are divided and hurting.

But in my opinion, this vote is not about the center of the Church. What we believe about God, ethics, mission and grace is not at stake. This is a vote about church organization and individual conscience. The Church's unity, identity and confession of faith are never found within individual issues but in Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

—Pr. Arthur

*"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*  
Hebrews 13:8