



EXTRAORDINARY
LUTHERAN
MINISTRIES

Theological Statement Supporting the ELM Vision Document

Beloved, freed and gathered by the Holy Trinity, grounded in the Lutheran confessional tradition, and impassioned by the prophetic call to mercy and justice, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) is an association of congregations, ministry organizations, and individuals covenanting with God and one another to gather, empower, and sustain faith communities that are committed to both the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life and ministry of the Lutheran churches.

THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR RESISTANCE, AUTHORITY, AND ORDINATION

A Community of Resistance, Anticipation, and Mission

In faithfulness to the Gospel and the embracing ministry of Jesus Christ, ELM opposes the policies and practices of the many Lutheran denominations all over the world which obstruct the candidacies of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) persons seeking admission to the rostered ministries of those churches and which often lead to the removal of GLBTQ persons from their rosters when their non-compliance with these policies and practices becomes known. In part, ELM is a community of resistance to such policies, to their lack of consistent enforcement, and to the practice of encouraging intentional deception to avoid the ramifications of their policies. These policies and practices deny the diversity of creation, fundamentally violate the created worth of all persons as sexual beings, disregard the sacredness of the primary relationships of all people, and put in jeopardy the ministry and roster status of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

However, ELM is more than resistance. It is a new way of being church in the world. If “ordinary” has come to mean “discriminatory,” we have chosen the adjective “extraordinary” deliberately to emphasize the “out-of-the-ordinary” nature of our community. In response to the urgent message of the reconciling and hopeful Gospel of Jesus Christ, we take seriously our responsibility to convey the message of reconciliation, unconditional regard and everlasting love to all people, especially those who have been left out of, or abandoned by the church that bears the name of Christ. We can no longer participate in this tragic denial of the diversity that is at the heart of God’s creation.

Neither can we leave unchallenged the religious teachings that oppress GLBTQ people and corrupt the Gospel message.

ELM anticipates that great day when the whole church will be able to recognize the gifts of the many diverse parts of the body of Christ and enable the full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. ELM is an anticipatory faith movement that lives in joyful tension with the whole Church with hope that our engaged resistance will model faithfulness to the Gospel and a freer and more just way live with, care for and minister to each other. We are called by the Gospel to live in the real, though not yet fulfilled, promise that will turn our weeping into joy (Psalm 126:6).

Authority

By whose authority do we call and ordain? By Christ's authority, for the purpose of joy and healing within the whole body of Christ, given for us and for all people. ELM takes refuge in the same emergency measures invoked by the 16th century reformers:

As a result, when the regular bishops become enemies of the gospel or are unwilling to ordain, the churches retain their right to do so. For wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers.

This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church, as Paul testifies to the Ephesians when he says: "When he ascended on high . . . he gave gifts to his people." Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for serving and building up the body of Christ. Therefore, where the true church is, there must also be the right of choosing and ordaining ministers, just as in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former. Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: "For where two or three are gathered in my name . . ." - Martin Luther.¹

ELM, like the reformers of old, has no desire to create a new church or to sever the ties of faith and communion that bind us to the assemblies that are our families in the faith. With love for the traditions and saints that formed us and embolden us to act with confidence, we seek to provide community for those denied the opportunity to fulfill their vocations because of the policies and practices of Lutherans the world over who have been imprisoned by discrimination and oppression.

Like all Christians, ELM treasures the unity of the Church. Like all Lutheran Christians, ELM treasures the traditions and structures of our catholic and Confessional heritage. Nevertheless, we believe that the Gospel compels us to act in solidarity with others and work

¹ *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, The Book of Concord, Fortress Press, 2000, 66-68.

together for justice. This work is not ours to choose. Rather it is our responsibility to bring to an end the injustice and discrimination that have imprisoned leaders and members of Lutheran churches throughout the world, conditioning them through policy and practice to categorize, exclude and malign people of certain sexual orientations and gender identities.

As long as Lutheran church bodies discriminate against GLBTQ persons and fail to embody faithfulness to the Gospel, we will resist and ignore their misguided policies and practices. With charity and humility on the one hand and confident of Christ's gracious invitation to welcome and salvation extended to all on the other hand, we will work to reform and renew the churches.

Ordination

The time has come for us to claim fully the extraordinary authority to certify, call and ordain pastors and rostered professionals on behalf of the whole church, especially when Lutheran bishops and other church leaders refuse to do so. Seeking to honor the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit and to comfort and encourage the faithful, we will set apart to Word and Sacrament ministry those whom God raises up and the churches call. While our actions may provoke and cause disunion, we must honor our baptismal obligation to build up the Body of Christ.

In response to the needs of the Gospel to reach people living in the modern world, we recognize that communities may take many forms. The 21st century is no longer the Christendom of the past millennium but rather bears greater resemblance to the world evangelized by the early Church, a world of conflict, change, and economic and social upheaval. We will endeavor to balance the wisdom of the faithful who have gone before us with the seemingly unique demands of the modern world, trusting in the grace and empowerment that God gives to the Church through the Word and Sacraments.

In addition to the many other shared values that stem from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our Lutheran confessional tradition, ELM is committed to fostering humility, charity, mutual accountability and discipline. We pledge to each other and to the whole Church a willingness to be accountable to each other in our faith and life together, to learn from each other and to grow in faith. In all things, we shall strive to provide for the health and true unity of the Body of Christ as God, in grace, gives us the ability.

ELM affirms the value of congregational calls and connecting congregations to specialized ministries because of their value for pastors and congregations and for our work of resistance, and we strongly encourage this practice to continue whenever possible. However, for the sake of the Gospel, we cannot rely solely on congregations that are willing to take a stand of principled non-compliance. While this may remain a hallmark of our mission, ELM supports calls to ministry in special circumstances and in agency contexts. In the event that ministry occurs in an agency context or other specialized setting, the Covenant Circle of ELM is authorized on behalf of the whole Church to issue the letter of call. Recognizing the mutual

nature of ministry between a pastor and the community served, the governing board will provide for the accountability and support of one ordained in these circumstances.

The Rite of Extraordinary Ordination

Rooted in the extraordinary ordinations that were performed by Martin Luther and the reformers as recorded in the Lutheran Confessions, and in accordance with our vision, policies and bylaws, ELM will authorize ordination of extraordinary candidates for ministry. An extraordinary ordination may occur when: an individual has received a call from God; God's call is discerned and accepted by the ordinand; the call is recognized and endorsed by the governing board of ELM; and the call is ratified by the Church through the issuance of a letter of call to the ordinand from one or more congregations, assemblies, parishes or communities of believers.

The call from God is to be a minister of Word and Sacrament in and to the one, holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church. All power in the rite of ordination belongs to God. However, so that the catholicity of the church may be expressed, bishops, pastors, and representatives of other congregations and faith communities will be invited to participate in the laying on of hands. The assembled clergy affirm the ordinand's call and the prayer of the Church by joining in the laying on of hands, and also thereby affirm and welcome the ordinand into the college of ministers of Word and Sacrament. The laity participate in this gracious act of God; by presenting the ordinand and thus naming the ordinand worthy to be set apart and; by speaking their "Amen" to the prayer invoking the pastoral gifts of the Holy Spirit upon the ordinand.