

TREASURE IN CLAY JARS:

Stories of LGBTQ Leaders in the Lutheran Church



But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

—2 Corinthians 4:7

FOREWORD

Years ago, the United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns created *And So We Speak*, a collection of stories written by LGBTQ clergy and seminarians. With their blessing, we decided to create a Lutheran edition highlighting the stories of LGBTQ leaders in the Lutheran church. Stories shape us and change our hearts and minds in ways few things can, inviting us into new worlds even as we re-imagine the one we are in.

As LGBTQ leaders in the Lutheran church we have been shaped and changed by the story of God, especially as this story has interacted with our LGBTQ identity and our vocational calling. Our stories are filled with challenges, joys, questions, convictions, wonderings, faithfulness, and hopefully more than a tinge of fabulousness. Sometimes our stories have been lonely or isolating; other times they have been filled with powerful community. Our stories are extraordinary, but only because they are filled and shaped and blessed by the extraordinary power of God.

This extraordinary power of God has been evident throughout the movement for LGBTQ justice in the Lutheran church. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (and its predecessor bodies) has been affirming and

supporting publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders, candidates, and seminarians since 1990. Policies, laws, and attitudes continue to change both in the church and society. For that, we give thanks. But the work is far from over. And we are as committed to our mission now as ever:

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries affirms and supports LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those pursuing a call to rostered leadership, while engaging allied congregations and ministries to proclaim God's love and seek justice for all.

In the following pages we offer these stories of our lives as LGBTQ leaders in the Lutheran church as a testament to this treasure in clay jars, with the conviction that although they are our stories, they ultimately belong to God. We hope our stories may resonate with your stories. Together, we can continue to re-shape and re-imagine our church and world as we are transformed by the work of God in and among us all.

EXTRAORDINARY LUTHERAN MINISTRIES

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries believes the public witness of LGBTQ+ ministers transforms the church, enriches the world, and proclaims God's love and call to justice.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries does this work through three main programs: Candidacy Accompaniment, Ministry Engagement, and Proclaim—a professional community for LGBTQ rostered leaders, candidates, and seminarians. Learn more at www.elm.org.

All of the stories and short responses in this collection are from members of the Proclaim community. We give thanks to the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Philip N. Knutson Endowment, which provided funding for this project.

There is a short glossary of terms and a brief timeline of key highlights for LGBTQ rostered leaders in the Lutheran Church at the end of this collection.

REV. ANGELA NELSON

GOD AND ME—A LOVE STORY IN SEVERAL ACTS



Photo credit: Robert Pitts

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, GOD AND I HAVE BEEN BUDDIES. I used to pray out loud to Him on the walk to the school bus, on the way home, playing by myself in the backyard and, of course, in worship. Dad used to read through the Bible with me every night, according to the bookmark reading plan we got somewhere, and we'd pray the Lord's Prayer before bed. I pretended enough times that I was asleep (I just liked listening to Dad), that eventually Dad just stuck with the Leviticus benediction every night.

"The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace."

Usually followed with a squeeze or a tickle (if I was standing upright and he was going to bed before I was) and a kiss on top of the head. He still gives my sister and I that blessing whenever we're home, though now it's when he's on the way to bed and we're still awake for a few hours.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, GOD IN JESUS HAS BEEN SORT OF A BIG BROTHER. I'd talk things through with Him. I'd look to Him for advice and an example. He'd help me pull myself up by my bootstraps. I could tell everybody how much He loved them. But for some reason I'd shrug it off to hear that love for myself. I was never good enough for that. Never righteous enough or pure enough or giving enough. Jesus was

gonna help me get there. Help me be the man of God who was honorable and strong and devoted. Maybe, if I was lucky, help me have the courage and passion to be a martyr someday. But I wasn't there yet, so I knew He couldn't be proud of me. It was just weird to consider that He loved me.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS BEEN ONE GIANT GENDERLESS MYSTERY. This sort of wind that whistled outside my bedroom window, the thread that tied together all of Scripture, the gift-giver of all virtues and good acts. In Hebrew we learned that the word for Spirit is gendered feminine, that the Holy Spirit initially was talked about as a 'She,' grammatically speaking. And in college I began to hear a whole lot of 'She' language about God. Actually a whole lot of folks said that the 'He' who is my brother and my buddy shouldn't be given a gender at all, but needed to be neutered so to encompass both male and female. This drove me batty. I understood the point of characteristics pertaining to certain genders being illustrated in God's love and care and justice and might, but when my worship began to sing of God without gender, I rolled my eyes and heaved a sigh of exasperation and shook my head and talked with God about it while walking between classes. My first boyfriend called me chauvinist.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, THE CHURCH HAS BEEN A PLACE OF WELCOME, OF EMBRACE, of near-magic where stories of God and God's people come alive and so do the bread and the wine. I was a child raised in a small church whose people noticed my gifts and put me in positions of leadership. Reading, acolyting, guiding newcomers through the liturgies and sitting with folks who sat alone: this was my ministry from a young age. There were buzzings of conflict here and there, but kids aren't usually brought into those discussions. I only caught second-hand that somebody was anti-gay and it would "suit him right to have a gay son". I only caught second-hand that because of another denomination's stance on gay marriage (back in the 1990s) one of our families came to our parish for a better welcome. I only caught second-hand that people don't talk openly and directly about these sorts of things in church.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, I HAVE WANTED TO BE AN AMERICAN GLADIATOR: gym class for grownups, and getting paid for it, too! I loved Xena, Warrior Princess, I watched 'wrestling' on TV with Dad, I rejoiced to click the gears up on my bike and ride hard and fast down to the park and back. I was a bookworm, but I was a bookworm who loved my body and all the strength and speed it had. But there were parts of my body I could not be proud of. Puberty made sure of that. And there were wants of my body that I could not openly acknowledge. My piety made sure of that. So shame crept in, fear of sin and misunderstanding, and my buddy God and I got in a number of pretty serious arguments about the Old Testament and my place in it. Was this all a game to prove by people's suffering that God is omnipotent?

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, PEOPLE HAVE ENCOURAGED ME TO BE A PASTOR. I have, after a few glitches along the way, done just that. Ever since I can remember being asked about my 'call story,' I have simply said that the church was where I fit best, where I was most welcome, where I felt most connected and alive and curious. But that story has had to change. Because at the end of my first year of seminary I had to admit that I was attracted to women as well as men. And suddenly the church was no longer as automatically welcoming to me. Suddenly I remembered those second-hand conversations at church when I was growing up. Suddenly I had to come up with somewhere else to go, something else to be. Suddenly it was just me and God, because I was suddenly very uncannily afraid of the church.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, GOD HAS LOVED ME EVEN WHEN I WAS UNAWARE OF IT. Even when I was unaware of myself. When the world dropped out from under me, which was how it felt when I lost my position of hetero-privilege, there was a moment of clarity between me and She, between myself and the feminine side of God. Such language no longer makes me roll my eyes. When I sat with my feelings for another woman, my God came at me with such feelings even more strongly, and I was able to hear in my marrow that God loved me. In that language

which had irritated me for so many years, in the light of my own mystery at not even knowing myself, God drowned me in adoring love the likes of which I had not even known I could want or receive.

When I was in the midst of this turmoil of unknowing myself and being known by God, I knew intellectually that I had allies, that I had supportive friends I could talk to, but it was my dearest friend, a gay man, who had the pastoral presence and good timing to ask me how I was when the only answer I could give was to fall apart on his couch. Because of his witness, his openness, his courage, which he would not have called courage, I was able to connect with a physical and present reminder of God's call and the cloud of witnesses which had not deserted me as I first felt I had been deserted. This is why I need to live openly, to offer similar witness, to be present and identifiable as another outsider still somehow serving. Because of my friend, without whose couch I may not have survived this crisis, I need to live as a light for others who might also be floundering.

A friend of mine has reflected that in her coming out she has found herself not so much now part of a statistic or a social group, but part of a community. With every positive experience of coming out she has received a welcome, an embrace, and a measure of understanding. Is this not what the church is about? Not statistics, not demographics, but welcome, understanding, honesty, and embrace. We are all outcasts, some of us more aware of it than others, and together as a community of the outcast we travel in this kingdom of God toward a more complete heaven. My candidacy committee knew I probably would not receive a call quickly, and probably not even be considered in synods which might have jumped at my paperwork before I came out. It has been frustrating to know that we could have done so much good and joyful work together had my orientation not been a stumbling block. It has been hard, and still is hard, to hear there are places within this church where I would not be safe, but I wonder how many who say that to protect me would stand beside me to walk with a parish in becoming safe for their own children and neighbors. There is so much pain and loss for the church to live in while divided over how to treat people and how to view the body and how to approach Scripture. I wonder

how to be pastoral in the midst of this mess, and it is more and more real to me that being all things to all people just is not possible, nor should it be. We have such a rich diversity of gifts and callings, and it is God's work we are about together. So if I cannot be your pastor, then God will send you someone who can, and I cannot let myself feel a failure because someone cannot see past some labels to hear what I am saying.

What I have learned is that being in the minority can be either a blessing or a ghetto. One brings life and light to the world around, the other insulates itself and slowly rots while the outside laughs and feels better for it. LGBTQIA is not an exclusive club we're born into while everyone else is normative and boring and probably wrong in their thinking. LGBTQIA Straight expresses a spectrum which is delightful and vulnerable and full of potential for God-only-knows-what.

There is a Hebrew poetic form which names the extremes to illustrate the whole. As Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, He is also everything in between; not just a mechanic who sets the world in motion and comes back in the end to set it all on fire and pick up the pieces, but one who walks with us in the Beta Gamma Delta.... So it is with the creation story, I now think, that God created us male and female, in that same poetic form which seeks to encompass the whole in a bit more brevity of language. I hope I would still have come to this thinking if I had not yet known myself to be more middle of the spectrum. The people I have been blessed to know by being publicly identifiable, the invitations to events and the sharing of stories, has been so enriching of my faith and my worldview. It's as much fun as getting a whole set of those illustrated WorldBook Encyclopedias as a kid. Truly no end to God's creativity and love - we're simply blessed to have time and space to explore it a bit.

IT'S BEEN THAT WAY EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER... how about you?

The Rev. Angela Nelson serves as pastor of Christ Our Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Chatham, NY.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD THINKS ABOUT YOU BEING LGBTQ?

*As I was voraciously reading all I could about LGBTQ folk in the church, I remember reading L. William Countryman and M.R. Ritley's book, *Gifted by Otherness*. What blew my mind away was their argument that God made us all who we are. As LGBTQ folk, we were not an accident, or an aberration. But rather, as LGBTQ Christians, we have a special witness, a different perspective to share with the Church and the world. We have the perspective of challenging stereotypes, of trusting in a God who is astoundingly loving of all people, of standing together as community.*

—Rev. Matt James,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Worcester, MA



I affirm that I am a beloved child of God, which is unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable and a person of value despite what others think of me personally. I admit that I am a broken and blessed man who has endured pain from others, at the same time loved by many unconditionally. God in me created a Gay Black man who is comfortable in his own skin. God loves me more than I could ever understand. I and God are not focused on my sexuality but focused on my studies here at Wartburg Seminary to be equipped to serve this fragile church that is too focused on consenting adults. My faith is strong through daily forms of isms, the deaths of my spouse, mother, and adopted sister and cancer twice.

—Gus Barnes Jr., Seminarian,
Wartburg Theological Seminary



God knew I was gay before calling me to ministry, even though I didn't. And God called me to know (and love) myself, that I may know and love God and God's creation.

—Jean Hay, First Call Candidate,
Burnsville, MN

I think God might think...People sure are funny the way they try to label everybody.

—Rev. Steven Wilco,
Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Amherst, MA

I think God is proud of me. Proud that I am still a work in progress. I think God is proud of the dignity I have accepted as part of God's love for me, shown through the many supportive close relationships in my life. God is proud that I'm not done, that now I have the opportunity to bring God's message of love to others who may have felt excluded.

—Rev. Caleb Crainer,
St Andrew's Lutheran Church
Los Angeles, CA



In giving me, a gay man, a call to ministry, God affirms my sexuality as a gift given and not a defect to hide. I know at the very core of my being, that God loves me, that God has gifted me, and that God wants to make use of me.

—Austin Newberry, First Call Candidate,
Columbus, IN

I believe God created me as I am, and that I am justified freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, because God loves me as I am, I do not have to work to earn my love, acceptance, approval, or well being. It is given to me by God in Christ. This is something I never experienced until I became Lutheran.

—Brach Jennings, Seminarian,
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Love is a gift from God. Both agape and eros. God gave me the gift of loving someone of my own sex. It is God's will. What does God think? God loves it.

—Cary Bass-Deschenes, First Call
Candidate, Oakland, CA

It sounds cheesy but honestly I believe God made me just as God intended and thinks I'm beautiful. My own and other people's perceptions are what gets in the way and my sense is that God is saddened and kind of mystified by that.

—Marissa Sotos,
Seminarian,
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



When many people thought I should pursue ministry I always shied away from it. Why would someone call some gay pastor? It was wrong, sinful, and against the rules of the church at that point. I'd wonder if there was a place for me in the church. It was the incarnational experience of seeing both gay and lesbian clergy members presiding, having a family, preaching, and engaging the poor and the sick that had a lasting impact on my experience. Time and again it is the result of the incarnation of both ideas and terminology that have shaped my call and my coming out story. To grasp what gay meant in the flesh dramatically expanded my understanding of the world and others. Experiencing the congregational affirmation of a God-given call through the ministry of gay and lesbian clergy opened my eyes to possibilities that I never thought possible.

—Rev. Jason Glombicki,
Wicker Park Lutheran Church,
Chicago, IL

I am wonderfully made, and God knew me in my mother's womb. My sexuality is a gift from God.

—Dug Swank, Osterburg, PA



I believe God mourns when the gifts God gives (in the case of my sexual orientation, gifts of desire, identity, community, pleasure, among many others) go ignored or untended, and I believe God rejoices when they are cultivated and celebrated for the good of the world!

— Joel Bergeland, Intern, St Paul's Lutheran Church, Santa Monica, CA

I think God created me beautiful, including my sexual orientation. It is just one of the many gifts God creates in us. And, then, God moves on. God says get over it...it is not the defining aspect of who you are as a Child of God.

—Lauren Morse-Wendt,
diaconal minister,
Mission and Ministry Developer,
Edina Community Lutheran Church,
Edina, MN

I struggled with this issue a lot. Especially while being in a different Lutheran denomination. After much prayer, I knew God loved me and accepted me as I am. This is how God made me and being wonderfully made I am His child. Our sexuality doesn't make a difference in God's eyes. It is how we live and proclaim His love. Because after all is said and done, God is love.

—Rev. Ernie Varga,
St Luke's Lutheran Church, Sidney, NY

I don't know if God sees distinctions like we see them. I like to think that God sees me being gay as no different than someone God equipped to preach the good Word, or a teacher who can reach a child like never before, or any person who can make the connection between the wonderfulness of who God made that person to be and addressing the deepest needs of the community that person lives in. In that vein, God equipped me, and every other person, to be special and to be useful. ...So, if God was to think about me at all, I'd be happy just knowing God spent an ounce of energy thinking about me, and that would be enough.

—Rev. Kevin O'Hara,
Lutheran Church of Our Savior,
Patchogue, NY

REV. CALEB CRAINER— COMING OUT AND CALLED: GOD IS HILARIOUS

For me MY COMING OUT STORY PARALLELED MY CALL STORY PACE FOR PACE. Things seem clearer now looking into the past, but navigating both at the time was hazy at best. Having grown up in the conservative Midwest, there weren't voices of LGBTQ advocacy in my world. There were people we knew and loved who I intellectually knew were "gay"...but that was a point of shame for some reason and certainly nothing we talked openly about at all. I ASSUMED THAT MY OCCASIONAL ATTRACTION TO SOMEONE OF THE SAME GENDER WAS A THING TO BE FOUGHT, SUBDUED, AND HIDDEN. I remember being asked "are you gay?" a few times as sort of a deriding question meant to embarrass me.

At the time it did embarrass me, so those feelings were shoved down. I also remember being teased because I liked church. One teacher in my high school went around the room and said different careers she could see each of us doing. She told me that she could see me being a pastor. I remember sinking down in my seat. I WAS DETERMINED NOT TO BE GAY AND TO NOT BE A PASTOR. God is hilarious.

It wasn't until I went away to college, in a different state, that I encountered new and radical ideas that challenged my faith first. Having grown up in an environment in which theological questions were met with immediate and authoritative answers, ideas that burst that bubble were completely novel. I think I owe my theological and personal development in large part to the challenges some courageous and patient female professors posed to my ingrained patriarchal mentality. Eventually, my readings and exploration developed a newfound respect for a host of critical thinking arenas. I switched my allegiance



from the conservative church of my youth to the branch that valued open-ended biblical questioning and celebrated their female clergy. The day I called my pastor from home to break the news was a difficult day, but I remember him saying that he wasn't always satisfied with the confines of our tradition, and that he was actually happy that I had found a home in another church. He also affirmed that no matter what, I would always be a loved "son of the congregation." That was my first experience "coming out" about my call and it was encouraging.

I cultivated language around LGBTQ experience in the church and quickly found how isolating that was even within my new, more liberal, denomination. I didn't really know what was going on when I completely fell for a dashing male friend of mine. My emotions got stupid. I felt like a teenager. I remember how for the first time, love songs started to make sense. Having been bolstered by my "coming out" in terms of my faith, and armed with new affirming language, I decided to disclose my attraction. It was not returned, but not shamed. It was after that experience that my queer identity began to solidify alongside my call to ministry.

I came out to my parents at our first Thanksgiving together following my first semester in grad school. There were some tears (remember, they don't have pro-gay messages in their world) but mostly love for me, uncertainty about my future. Again, not the horror story that many LGBTQ people have experienced. They seemed less surprised when I told them a few months later that I wanted to be a pastor. "Is that possible?" they asked, at the time I honestly didn't know. I had some conversations with local clergy who seemed optimistic about the future, so I CHOSE TO RISK IT. God had softened the hearts of so many in my life I trusted God was at work on the heart of the church as well.

But now the questions would be more specific: How and when would I come out during the candidacy process? I WANTED TO BE IN CONTROL OF MY SELF-DISCLOSURE during my internship year. I knew that although the church I was about to serve had experienced itself as a supportive environment for LGBTQ people, they hadn't been proactive about holding

difficult discussions among congregants, nor had they endeavored to attain status as a Reconciling in Christ congregation. It was an ethnically diverse congregation and I suspected many members were less accepting than the supervising pastor himself. When I arrived, I thought it would be best to get to know the congregation as their intern pastor first, then come out to the leadership when it was appropriate. Turns out that was kind of foiled. I heard later that my supervisor has spoken of me, prior to my arrival, as an out gay intern. So folks knew. I just didn't know that they knew. At that point the rules prohibiting gay clergy were firmly in place, although in the process of being dismantled.

But not knowing all this, I came out to my supervisor in our first conversation. I had included being gay in my internship application essay, but I wanted to establish a precedent of open dialogue. So I believe I said something like "I want to make sure you know that I'm gay and I'm out, but I'm not sure how to navigate that in a congregation." He didn't try to shield me too much, which I appreciated, saying that there would probably be some hold outs, but assured me that he was on board. By that point, I had already held similar conversations with my seminary faculty, so the practice helped. Coming out isn't a onetime thing. It's a continual process, every day.

Over the year I led a weekly Bible study on affirming views of LGBTQ bible stories. It was attended by a few, but avoided by others. I came out to my internship committee early on, who functioned in an extremely supportive capacity as I navigated how best to publicly identify myself. While on internship, I was invited by an out gay colleague to attend a retreat of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries where they would launch a new program called "Proclaim" to support out LGBTQ clergy. That retreat proved instrumental in giving me the momentum I needed to preach about my own experience as a gay man in the church and to fill out my paperwork fully disclosing myself as gay.

THE CONGREGATION RESPONDED IN LOVE. Turns out some hadn't realized I was gay, others had known for a long time and wondered when I would speak about my experience. I was

particularly surprised by the warm reception from members of the congregation of African-descent. I realized my privilege and prejudice kept me from risking being myself with them until I had established a relationship first. It seems kinda silly now, but the lesson I learned was that being myself provided a space for people to be more authentic with me in return.

When I interviewed for a call to become solo pastor, I knew it was important for me to talk with the call committee¹ about my being gay, even though they had known about it before the interview. I think one of the reasons the committee chose to recommend me for the call was my forthrightness and gentleness. They appreciated my questions and being able to share their experiences as I listened. There are folks who have been opposed to my leadership as an LGBTQ pastor. They have chosen to withdraw from the congregation rather than make waves.

Now I'm into my third year as a publicly identified gay ELCA pastor in Los Angeles, and I've learned

that being a pastor is challenging in lots of respects. Thanks to the Proclaim community and ELM, I feel supported and encouraged to be fully myself with the congregation I serve. Our message of love and an inclusive welcome seems to be taking root in the neighborhood as we've seen several families decide to become involved with the church over the past years. We even have a few other LGBTQ identified persons who have started attending. One recently told me, "I never thought I would find a church where I felt comfortable and honest until I came here. It's so nice to have a church home again." The spirit is moving in our ministry and I can't wait to see what's next.

The Rev. Caleb Crainer serves as pastor of St Andrew's Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, CA.

¹Call committee: a group of people (usually in a congregation) who are tasked with interviewing and recommending a candidate for call in a congregation or ministry.

REV. STEVEN WILCO— COMING OUT AS A DELICATE DANCE

When I was first coming out, a friend gave me some good advice: “YOU DON’T COME OUT ONCE. You are always making decisions about coming out in every new context.” The call process made that very clear.



I finally came to terms with my sexual orientation during seminary, and starting at my approval I made a decision that I WANTED TO BE UPFRONT about that at every stage of the process going forward and to come out in person when possible rather than on paper. I was also determined to do everything in my power to keep the focus on the mission and ministry of the church. I had no idea how I would do it.

At my approval interview, I slipped the detail into a response to a question asking me to review my call story. I saw a reaction, so I knew it had registered, but no one asked a follow up question. It probably wasn’t the best way to handle it, but as a first attempt I at least had said it. This was after the 2009 Churchwide decision but before the official new policies had been written, so we were all feeling our way through something new. They asked for a follow up conversation after the initial interview; we discussed it openly, and they handled it well. I was approved.

At the time, the forms had not been updated to include the possibility of same-gender partners. I shared my sexual orientation in the section that was only for bishops to read. Since I wouldn’t get a chance to talk in person with them before they made decisions, I felt that was important despite my preference to share that information in person when possible.

Coming out to congregations was more difficult. I MADE THE DECISION TO SHARE IT AT EACH STAGE IN THE PROCESS - call committee, council, and congregation. I was committed to being open and honest while also keeping the focus on finding a good match in terms of ministry and mission. The synod staff was incredibly supportive.

In both congregations where I interviewed with the call committee, I came out during the official interview so that the call committee would hear it all at once. I gave us plenty of time to talk about mission and ministry before it came up, but I also made sure it wasn’t just

thrown in at the end in a way that wouldn't allow us to talk about it. In the interview with the call committee of the congregation I now serve, there was an immediate affirming response and it was seen as a potential way to strengthen their public witness to inclusion.

I came out in a similar way to the church council during my interview with them and received a similar response. When it came time to meet the whole congregation I preached in worship and then began answering questions after the service. I was very aware as each hand was raised that I needed to find an opportunity to share my sexual orientation. Several questions in, someone asked if I would be bringing a family with me if I were called. I shared that I had recently become engaged and that I wanted them to know that I was gay and was engaged to another man. I shared his name and that his occupation was music therapy. There were maybe about 3 seconds of silence before the same person asked a follow-up question: "WELL, IS HE GOING TO SING IN THE CHOIR?"

I almost laughed out loud, partly in relief and partly in response to the way that despite the challenge to traditional gender roles, the important question was whether the pastor's spouse would sing in the choir.

In order to give the congregation the option of having time to process the information about my sexual orientation, I came back two weeks later for the actual call vote. While this congregation did not feel the need for additional communal conversations around that issue, I appreciated that we didn't rush the process despite the challenge of having to come back a second time.

My fiancé (now husband) came with me and met the congregation on the day of the call vote and sat with me while I waited for the results of the vote. A month later I started as the pastor at the church I have now served for three years. My husband did join the choir and has

been an active participant in the life of the congregation. He recently took a part-time job as a musician at another local church, and people now warmly ask about him and let me know they miss seeing him on Sundays.

As welcoming as my new community has been, the coming out never stops. I came out to a local newspaper reporter who covered my arrival at the church, so people in the community found out if they read the article. Our congregation's recent partnership with an LGBTQ-inclusive Boy Scout Troop prompted several headlines in local papers about the "gay pastor" (a term I will wrestle with until we start identifying others as "straight pastors").

More often than not people find out I'm a pastor (that's its own kind of coming out!) before they know I'm gay. People are often surprised, usually pleasantly so, to find out that I'm both gay and a pastor. I know that many new visitors often take a while to find out that I'm married to a man. And sometimes I worry about the moment when they find out. I don't hide it, but I also don't broadcast it every Sunday. Sometimes people who don't know me well ask about my wife, and there's an awkward moment when I respond about my husband, or my internal awkwardness in rare moments when I make a pastoral decision not to make a correction in the moment (with a grieving family member at a funeral, for instance). Even in a very progressive community people who might not otherwise make the assumption still assume I'm straight because I'm a pastor. While I try to be bold about it and most people are supportive, there are days when it's still difficult to be the one challenging assumptions or addressing questions or concerns. Though it happens less and less, I still find myself making decisions fairly often about when and how to come out in my public role as a pastor.

The Rev. Steven Wilco serves as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Amherst, MA.

HOW DID YOU COME OUT TO [FILL IN THE BLANK]?

35 years ago, my family was not ok with me being Gay. My father blamed my mother's brother who was gay for this. My mother always supported my decision and as the years went by they seemed to be okay with it until I dated a white man. All of their issues resurfaced again. My solution was to support us or lose us. Again they accepted my partner Jim; we were in a relationship for 20 years until 2011 when he passed of heart complications. It has been in the last few years that my father and I have reconciled our relationship.

—Gus Barnes Jr., Seminarian,
Wartburg Theological Seminary



The brain in me that worked so hard to keep me in the closet for my first 10 years of knowing I was attracted to my same sex, which worked so hard on problems of philosophy, music theory, and politics, which reached out to the farthest reaches of the universe and tried to reach beyond, to the other side of the universe into whatever might be beyond, and that dismissed the possible reality of God, ended up taking a back seat to my gut and to my heart after I came out.

—Chris Wogaman,
First Call Candidate, Minneapolis, MN



When I was first coming out to myself, I decided not to talk to God about it. I knew that was folly, since I believe God knows everything about us, but still, I did not want to pray about it. Later in the process, I would pray, "God, if this is a sin, I guess I need to confess that. But I don't think it's a sin..." which usually sent me into a new tailspin about arrogance and arguing with God about what is and isn't worth confessing. Then I read Mel White's book, "A Stranger at the Gate" and realized Mel was saying God loved him and had made him gay. I realized in that moment I believed God loved me in spite of the fact I was gay. It was time to open up to the possibility that God had made me, and in fact, God had to have made me gay, because here I was, flesh and blood, beloved child of God, and loving a woman.

—Rev. Brenda Bos,
Christ Lutheran Church,
San Clemente, CA

I came out to my candidacy committee in my entrance essay. It felt odd, because I knew I would specifically have to discuss my sexuality before being entranced into the process. My home congregation never officially knew, but my pastor did. In both cases, I was saddened that originally the LGBTQ issue had to be at the forefront of my coming to seminary. I am more balanced now, and am able to say I believe God called me to this; I certainly didn't choose it on my own!

—Brach Jennings, Seminarian,
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary



Because of the ELCA's pre-2009 policy regarding ordination, I felt it necessary to be open with my candidacy committee that I didn't know what form love would take in my life and I was unwilling to say no to love in order to be a pastor in the ELCA. Since my home congregation was supporting me emotionally, spiritually, and financially, I also needed to be upfront with them about the possibility that I would be told I couldn't be ordained because of my sexual orientation. This also meant that I needed to come out to my parents, because if the church council, pastor, and youth minister all knew before my parents, that would be a bit problematic. So I began the process of coming out to my parents and brother as well as my church leadership. I received a lot of support as well as some well-intentioned warnings about the difficulty I would face as a queer woman seeking ordination.

—Rev. Emily E. Ewing,
Christ the King Lutheran Church,
South Jordan, UT

If I honestly share my faith journey, wrestling with my sexuality has been part of it. (Probably more wrestling with my church's response.) If I honestly share how God has equipped and empowered me for ministry, how my sexual orientation is perceived by the world is part of it. If I honestly share my passions, the way my orientation has connected me to other justice causes is part of it. I just tell my story the real way, and that naturally includes "coming out."

—Rev. Lura Groen,
Grace Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

I filled out the candidacy application and attached to it a letter. What I'd tried to say was that I knew the rules, and I thought they were wrong; that I'd be an agent of change, but that I'd stick to them until they changed. The candidacy committee chair was kind. She took me out to lunch, and we talked for a while about the candidacy process in general. Then she asked me about the letter. Did she want me to share it with the whole committee? There were other queer people who had gone through the process in silence. It might be a lot easier for me to just keep things between us. Knowing her, I think she was genuine; her concern was more for me, for my well-being. But I don't doubt it would have been easier for the committee as well. The only time throughout candidacy that I chose not to be open was during my internship. Omaha, Nebraska is not exactly renowned for its tolerant attitudes, though they do have a wonderful MCC church as well as a fine Pride festival. There, I shared my sexual orientation only with my supervisor, with the church secretary who had become a close friend, and with a few members of the congregation who had first come out of the closet to me. That silence taught me how unhealthy it is—especially as you build a relationship with a congregation—to lock away part of yourself. I had hidden my sexuality in workplaces before seminary, but this was so much more difficult.

—Rev. Aaron Decker,
Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Holden, MA



It was important to me to be clear and honest with my candidacy committee from the very beginning. I shared that I was gay, though not in a serious relationship, in my first meeting with the synod office before candidacy began. The response was, "Are you sure you don't want to join the UCC?" I said I was Lutheran and started the paperwork. My sexuality was included in my entrance and endorsement essays very briefly to ensure that there was no secrecy, and it was briefly mentioned during my entrance and endorsement interviews. Everyone knew it was an issue, but they focused on my theology and we continued to move forward. By the time I was ready for my approval interview, I was in a serious relationship and determined that I needed to disclose that to my candidacy committee. I wrote a letter indicating my non-compliance with Vision & Expectations that accompanied my approval essay. It changed everything. My very supportive candidacy committee spent over half of our approval time together discussing the letter and crying with me over what they felt was their inability to go against ELCA policy at the time. It was one of the most difficult hours of my life, not only because of what I knew was coming, but because I felt like I needed to be strong for this team of people who had been so supportive of me for years and now had to vote to postpone me.

—Lauren Morse-Wendt,
diaconal minister,
Mission and Ministry Developer,
Edina Community Lutheran Church
Edina, MN

The nice old ladies from the church where I was a supply pastor started to ask who the woman with me was. She introduced herself, saying she was "with Brenda," like we had driven carpool together. We both hated that response. So at the potluck after church, a couple who had been particularly friendly to me came up to me and my wife. The man said, "This is my wife" and I said, "This is my wife." They happily greeted her and we moved on. Next thing we know, they are trotting over the lesbian from the congregation for us to meet (pretty sure there was but one), and so it went. I didn't make a general announcement. My wife and I agreed we really want to be out in as many situations as possible. We know I'll never interview for a pastor position without coming out before meeting with the call committee.

—Rev. Brenda Bos,
Christ Lutheran Church,
San Clemente, CA

In a meet and greet with the congregation, I was asked to share my story, and so in sharing my call story, I chose to leave in my coming out rather than editing it out of the story. This not only gave me an easy way to come out, but it also couched it in the context of God's call in my life, which I think was accurate and beneficial.

—Rev. Emily E. Ewing,
Christ the King Lutheran Church,
South Jordan, UT

During the first interview with the congregation I now serve, things actually weren't going well. I was stuck in a car for 4 1/2 hours (three times as long as it should have taken) and I had no dinner, so I have starving. The congregation was alerted that day that their previous pastor had unexpectedly passed away (she retired from the congregation 8 months before). The conversation we had was difficult. There were awkward moments and long silences. I figured, what the hell, I had nothing left to lose. I told them I didn't want to tear apart any church that hadn't dealt with this but I also wanted to be truthful and was living in a partnered relationship. That pretty much ended the interview that night. I figured that was it (and got an e-mail from one member saying as much). But God has other plans... and it's been a great marriage since.

—Rev. Kevin O'Hara, Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Patchogue, NY

I described my coming out to myself and my family in my entrance essay as a faith-forming event. I also mentioned it while telling "my story" during my initial interview and my panel interview. Most discussion of it from the New Jersey synod was making sure I felt welcome and fulfilled while in the process and at seminary in Gettysburg.

—Joseph Graumann Jr., Seminarian, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

Most of my coming out happens in the context of being married and casually talking about family. In my Rostered Leader Profile², I simply indicate that I am a member of Proclaim and then identify what Proclaim is. I don't reference the fact that I am gay anywhere else in that document. My first coming out, however, was actually a bit more intentional. I came to accept the truth about my being gay (and not bisexual as I had tried to convince myself I was) and not being able to change it (as I had tried to convince myself I could) after having been married to a woman for 16 years. After three years of processing what it meant for us to be in a mixed orientation marriage, we arrived at the understanding that it would be best for us to end the marriage but to remain best of friends. And that is what we have done. So my coming out was tied to telling family and friends of our decision to divorce and my acceptance of my sexual orientation. We did it through about a hundred personal conversations and phone calls and eventually by an e-mail letter to extended acquaintances. And apart from a handful of exceptions, we were affirmed, supported and loved through it all. And for that, I will be always thankful.

—Rev. Shawn Brandon,
Interim Pastor at
Gloria Dei! Lutheran Church,
Arnold, MD

I made my first steps toward candidacy for ordination in the ELCA by asking the bishop if he could direct me to any openly gay pastors to ask about ministry, after we had worshipped together at the annual Reconciling in Christ service.

—Chris Wogaman, First Call Candidate,
Minneapolis, MN

²Rostered Leader Profile (RLP): Part of the paperwork candidates seeking rostered ministry in the ELCA fill out to share with congregations and ministry sites.

REV. JULIE BOLEYN— COURAGE OF CONVICTION: GETTING MARRIED IN THE CHURCH



I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHICH STORY TO TELL YOU.

I could tell you about the time that I watched the movie “Go Fish” (a lesbian love story), and it scared me so much that I proposed to my then-boyfriend on the spot.

Or, I could tell you about the time that I sat in Bible study and really knew *for the first time* that God’s love was really for me just as I am.

Or I could tell you about the time that my seminary tried to deny my partner and me housing, that is, until they learned it would have been illegal. (Sometimes we are saved by the law).

Or I could tell you about the time I went on internship, pregnant and unwilling to hide my partner, which resulted in eight people boycotting my existence.

We could be here all day; there are so many stories to tell.

But today, I WILL TELL YOU THE STORY OF OUR WEDDING.

It was actually my second wedding (see “Go Fish” story above), but Jeanie’s first. Jeanie and I had met

at a conference four years prior. She was running the bookstore for the WOW/2000 gathering in DeKalb, Illinois, and I was her faithful volunteer.

After the books were set up, the vendors in place, and the room was rightfully adorned with rainbow satin, Jeanie looked up and really saw me for the first time. And, I vice versa. In that moment we were both able to take a breath, and we saw possibility there that extended far beyond the bright array of books around us.

Four years later, we found ourselves living together in Evanston, Illinois.

We had also found a church by that time - St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. They knew that I wanted to be a pastor, and they thought that was cool, and so they put me on the call committee. I was really grateful for the experience. It may be true that I took a bit of advantage with my position on the committee, when I asked our prospective Pastor, “How would you feel about officiating at my wedding to my partner, Jeanie?”

She paused just long enough that I knew she’d really thought about the question, but not so long that I started to worry about her well-being. Then, with some delight and trepidation, she said, “Yes, I’d be honored.” And thus began our real planning.

It's important that you know that this church was not Reconciling in Christ, meaning it had no formal statement of welcome for LGBTQ folks in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They had never considered whether they were okay with LGBTQ weddings. In fact, Jeanie and I were the only out LGBTQ folks in the church at the time. Also, just to make matters more complicated, WE WERE INSISTENT THAT THE SERVICE BE CALLED A WEDDING, and that what was being blessed was a marriage, sans the legal benefits.

The prospective pastor, who had said Yes to me in the interview, Rev. Sheri Delvin, became our called pastor. Now she realized the hypothetical question in the interview was to be reality. She asked us into her office.

She laid out the complications. And we resisted. Strenuously. With tears. Now that I am a pastor myself, I understand what a bind she felt she was in. We were asking her to risk her new call and her fledgling relationship with a congregation she was growing to love. She bargained, "What if we were to call it a blessing? You know, we should probably call all weddings blessings anyway."

My heart sank at her words. I could see that Jeanie was drawing into herself too, her words careful and simple, then rushing. "We have worked so hard, so hard. To call it a blessing feels like calling it something less, less than what we mean, less than what we want. Less than our hope. To call it a blessing would feel incomplete, it would feel like we were giving into shame."

It would be another very long story to tell you how it was that WE MOVED FROM FEELING LIKE WE NEEDED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHO KNEW ABOUT "US" TO FEELING DECISIVE AND PUBLIC ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP. It was a difficult road, and it had left us feeling vulnerable at times. Our conviction was so newly won, that we needed our allies to sign on full-heartedly, because we relied so heavily on their support when we wavered ourselves.

The pastor was wise, and brave, and determined to ascend her fears. The following week we brought the facts to council which I also sat on. At that the same council meeting I also proposed that instead of renting

a reception hall, Jeanie and I would donate our sweat to renovate the fellowship hall (the room was hideous, decked out in the sins of the 50's with box valences and puce walls). The pastor was prepared to white-knuckle it through the meeting—but when presented with the plans, everyone at the table rejoiced, pulled out their calendars to write the date in pen, and wondered at our worry. She and I shared a secret look of surprise and delight.

Work soon began in earnest. The designer chose colors, the ugly valences were removed, the plaster was repaired, and every weekend thereafter was devoted to paint. On the day of the ceremony, the room was transformed, no longer a dirty pink, the windows were lit with the beauty of an October day, sunlight falling gently on the white and light green walls.

At four o'clock on that October afternoon, we set out down the aisle, following the processional cross, just as any other wannabe pastor couple would do. We stood at the front of the sanctuary and made promises to each other, my sister and her brother by our side. I remember well how the people sang, with joy reverberating off the rafters. Our families, our friends, and most of the church attended, and 140 came upstairs to share in the joy of homemade chicken parmesan and two-buck chuck.

I fear giving you any moral to this story. I could tell you this risky thing we did didn't require all the worry we had put into it. But, it only would have taken one outraged parishioner to change that story. I could tell you the warmth of community melted would-be protestors' hearts. But I don't have solid proof of that. I could tell you that this is a story of a church that longed for people to believe in them, to believe they had something to give and to share, as much as we needed them to believe in us. But, again, that's hard to prove. Here's what I do know: these ten years later, I STILL LOOK BACK ON THAT DAY WITH AWE AND GRATITUDE—for Pastor Sheri Delvin who sucked it up and did it anyway, for our dear friends who still enjoy telling the story of that meal, for the church that really wanted to attend our wedding, for the sweat, for the hope, for the joy. And most certainly, for Jeanie, without whom, I never would have dared to try.

The Rev. Julie Boleyn serves as pastor at Unity Lutheran Church in Berwyn, IL



HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BEING “THE FIRST” IN YOUR CONTEXT?

I am the first openly gay candidate for ministry in the Central-Southern Illinois Synod, and the first candidate [from that synod] to attend PLTS in ten years. I stand on the shoulders of all the people who came before me in ELM, who worked courageously to help change this church's policy on human sexuality. I stand on those people's shoulders, and am grateful to them.

—Brach Jennings, Seminarian,
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

I was the first intern at my congregation, St. Paul's Santa Monica, CA. They had decided to be intentional about having LGBTQ interns, knowing there are not enough sites for us. Not only did the congregation have to learn how to love someone for only a year and then say goodbye, they had to learn to be patient and honest as the pastor is being formed. It also affirmed their own sense of welcome for LGBTQ pastors, even though their pastor is openly gay... now they saw they were living in to this welcome beyond just their beloved pastor, into newbie interns and strangers. They learned many positive things about themselves, as it went from a relationship with a person to a program. Of course, Becca Seely came along the second year and showed them the first year wasn't a fluke, and Joel Bergeland will be their third-time charm!

—Rev. Brenda Bos,
Christ Lutheran Church,
San Clemente, CA

I am the first openly gay pastor with a partner serving a church in North Carolina Synod. To my knowledge this is still true.

—Rev. David Eck, Abiding Savior
Lutheran Church, Fairview, NC

I'm one of the few out gay clergy people who serve in a place that had been served by out gay clergy prior to my arrival. Sometimes I find the trail nicely blazed for me, other times I find myself differentiating my own experience and identity in ways that challenge my congregation. For example, my predecessor was partnered, I am single, so our lifestyles are different and require adjusting congregational expectations. I think being gay creates a space where my congregation is free to ask questions and vocalize their support in ways they might not if I was straight.

—Rev. Caleb Crainer,
St Andrew's Lutheran Church,
Los Angeles, CA

In the early years of my ministry, being the first out gay pastor at my previous congregation had occasional awkward moments. Lutherans in our neighborhood who were less accepting of LGBTQ people would visit the church repeatedly and seem to really like it. Then they would find out that I'm gay and disappear mysteriously. Only a couple of people had the courage to explain to me that that was why they stopped attending; but there were several people whose unexplained disappearance seemed to follow something I had said in a sermon or announcement about being gay. It saddened me that I couldn't talk with them about it. But for every person who disappeared, there were probably five people who came specifically because we were a congregation committed to full inclusion of LGBTQ people. Some of these newer members were gay, but most of them were people who were just looking for a church that did not discriminate in a hypocritical way.

— Rev. Steve Keiser,
Christ Lutheran Church,
Upper Darby, PA



I have been the first female pastor/minister in a couple of congregations. There were struggles. Now I am the first openly GLBT pastor in the Southwestern Minnesota synod. Many congregations would have called me if I had not “come out of the closet.” Or if I promised to stay celibate. I have found this more frustrating than being the first woman pastor.

—Rev. Kelly Heide, Chaplain at
St. Croix Hospice, Spencer, IA

It seems in my daily life I am usually the first gay, black, male, 53 year old that comes to encounter someone. I feel that it's always important for me not to have a “chip” on my shoulder to welcome the one who may not initially welcome me. I will be the “first” minister in my family history, and I stand on the shoulders of those who were afraid to proclaim their value in the world. I serve three churches in the Greater Milwaukee Synod who are my cloud of witnesses that support and give me hope!

—Gus Barnes Jr., Seminarian,
Wartburg Theological Seminary

I just became the first transgender graduate from New England's School of Lay Ministry. I tried to largely leave the transgender part out of the experience, but there were people who wanted to understand, so I got to teach them about being marginalized, while showing that one can rise above it. I made a lot of friends there just by being myself. Now I'm off to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia where, hopefully, I will teach more people these things.

—Nancy Wichmann, Seminarian,
Lutheran Theological Seminary at
Philadelphia



I am the first intern at my congregation (and also the first LGBTQ intern). Our congregation is also the first (and only) RIC congregation in our Synod. My experience has been wonderful and positive, as the congregation really lives into what it means to be welcoming. It has taught them that their convictions about welcome and hospitality are real and that they are living out the Gospel. I am Pastor Amy first, and a gay pastor second. They have welcomed my girlfriend as well.

—Amy Hanson, Chaplain Resident,
Denver, CO

In the last two congregations I have served (one for three months while the congregation's pastor was on sabbatical and currently as an interim where I have been for five months so far), Mo and I have been the first same-gendered married couple in the room. And, as far as I know, we have been the first gay people to be part of the congregations (at least publicly so). One experience has been sadness. And that sadness has come when a very few members of each of these congregations have chosen to leave the congregation rather than have a gay, married pastor. The sadness is particularly rooted in the severing of relationships in these cases. However, the primary experience has been that of surprise and joy as we have found ourselves welcomed, embraced and loved by these congregations. It is as if, in our situations, the new day has dawned for LGBTQ people and it is a glorious new day indeed.

—Rev. Shawn Brandon,
Interim Pastor at
Gloria Dei! Lutheran Church,
Arnold, MD

NANCY WICHMANN— GROWING HUNGER FOR GOD



BEING TRANSSEXUAL AND HAVING LIVED IN BOTH GENDERS GIVES ME AN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE THAT FEW HAVE. Having been the target of hatred in the name of God and overcoming it gives me both the knowledge and the desire to minister to the disenfranchised, perhaps even showing by example that OUTCASTS CAN COME HOME.

From as early as I can remember, I knew I was different from other kids. I didn't have much interest in the things boys did; I was more interested in what the other girls did. Making friends with girls was much easier than with boys. It took many years before I realized I was not alone in being transgender. In the meantime, I tried hard to dismiss it.

I recognize now that I FELT A "HUNGER" FOR GOD very early in life. My early church experiences were largely of my own volition because my family was not very religious. To this day, I cannot recall a single time that God was mentioned at home.

Being transgender pitted me against all the authority figures in my life, especially my parents. My father,

in particular, could not understand why they kept catching me with some of my mother's clothes. He called me "queer." That word just cut through me whenever I heard it. He, furthermore, made it clear that I was an embarrassment to the family, and more so if I had to go see a therapist. I also heard condemnation in church (being in the South), where I was told I was an "abomination" even though they didn't know.

I believe that my father's reaction made it hard for me to accept the "loving father" picture of God. That, fortunately, did not prevent me from responding to God's call. As Paul said, I was destined to answer God's selection of me from before my birth.

Even though I had become active in the Methodist church as an adult and was studying the Bible regularly, I always had that nagging doubt in the back of my mind that I was "wrong" in God's eyes because of my "gender issues." One day, as I was reading a book, my eyes closed and an overwhelming feeling of love swept over me and I knew that GOD LOVED ME JUST THE WAY I WAS. That experience completely changed my feelings about God; my true faith journey was just beginning.

Having lived so long trying to be for others what I was not, has left me with some lingering self-image issues, but the Lord has been working hard on resolving those.

Indeed, looking back over the last several years, I CAN ALMOST SEE MYSELF AS A NEW CREATION.

In my interactions with people in the LGBT community, I frequently meet people who also have that hunger for God, even though they don't realize it. They have been so put off by hatred in the name of God that they feel that they must rebel. I believe these people could be reached and brought back home. I have yet to find ways to do it, but I do know

that having a welcoming church is not enough; we must go to them and invite them in. Additionally, we must be willing to apologize for the hatred directed at them, regardless of whether we had any part in it.

For a long time I, like many, held back from talking about God in public settings for fear of offending someone. I used to belong to an online transgender group. When I was baptized I posted a message about being recognized as a child of God. For that I was chastised. Others had made posts with the “P” word in them and, as far as I knew, were not corrected. Finding that “God” is worse than the “P” word really angered me and I quit the group. Since then I have resolved to no longer hold back; I will never again be afraid of talking about my Lord.

Five years ago, I FELT THE UNMISTAKABLE PRESSURE OF THE SPIRIT - probably the strongest I have ever felt. As soon as I was able, I began to meditate and knew that I was being called to minister to other people and the church. Not long after that God led me here to the ELCA, Boston, and Lutheran Church of the Newtons. So many things have happened since that it is only in hindsight that I can see it all as part of the preparation for ministry. I can look back too and see that as I have progressed in my faith, my happiness has blossomed as well.

Remembering my time as a Methodist Certified Lay Speaker, I decided to enroll in the ELCA’s School of Lay Ministry (SLM). It was a short sentence at the bottom of the brochure that forced me to ask about “rostered lay leadership.” As it was explained to me, I felt the unambiguous nudge from the Holy Spirit that it was time to take the next step. I was entered into candidacy for Associate in Ministry.

The following Spring, I started feeling “funny;” I found myself developing new thoughts on my place in the church. As I discussed some of this with friends, the feelings intensified to the point that I realized that my discernment had restarted without conscious effort. I began to see where my contemplations were leading me – towards ordination.

Several weeks into my renewed discernment, I was given the opportunity to lead a Morning Prayer

service for about two dozen people, including six pastors. When it was over, I had to confess that I was a “closet preacher.” During a break a pastor told me that there were ways a non-ordained person could do almost everything in the church except administer the sacraments. I IMMEDIATELY FELT THE SPIRIT SAYING THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH – I needed to prepare to do the sacraments as well. A month later, to the day, I was sitting in my first seminary class.

Earlier this year, I was told about Proclaim and joined. Almost immediately I got several welcoming emails, including one from Angela Nelson. We emailed a few times and she heard some of my story. Less than forty hours after I joined Proclaim, Angela sent me an email saying that she had just gotten her first call, and that she had been on the regular preaching rotation at the Boston MCC. She asked if I would consider taking her place.

That shook me so much that I had to take the rest of the day off. At some point I called my pastor to ask what he thought. I expected him to say something about not being ready. Instead he said it would be a good learning experience. Other friends said basically the same thing.

So a month later, I did my first sermon, on Transfiguration Sunday. Several people told me they liked the sermon, including several members of my home congregation who had heard my pastor’s sermon on the topic that morning.

Meanwhile, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia had hosted a dinner in the Boston area, and I attended because my seminary career had hit the inevitable financial roadblock. We were invited to come to LTSP for a visit. That weighed on my mind and I finally arranged the trip. It was crystal clear that I needed to be there, but I was scared of giving up my life which had finally become comfortable. It took several weeks before I reached the divine “yes” and the peace that comes from saying it.

Nancy Wichmann is a seminarian at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia in Philadelphia, PA

REV. DONNA SIMON— BECOMING THE “OLD SHOE”

Synod meetings are getting so much easier.

Back in 2000, when I arrived in Kansas City for my first call—pastor of Abiding Peace Lutheran Church—things were different.

I arrived in August. It was hot. Very hot—over one hundred degrees every day that week, with ridiculous humidity. So hot that people felt the need to lie to me and tell me it was never that hot in Kansas City.

The day after I arrived, I called the Central States Synod office. Central States includes all Missouri and Kansas congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I asked to speak to the bishop and was put through. I told him who I was and that I was the new pastor at Abiding Peace and was called from the Extraordinary Candidacy Project roster. Then I told him that I was sorry. I KNEW THAT MY CALL IN HIS SYNOD WAS GOING TO CREATE WORK FOR HIM, and I was indeed sorry for that. Then I told him the truth: the church had left us with few good choices. Gay and lesbian persons who were called by God to serve the ELCA had to either lie about who they were or tell the truth and find creative ways to be ordained. I suppose there was also the option of celibacy. So only two choices for me, and I am a terrible liar.

That was the first of many conversations with Bishop Maahs and his staff. In every meeting, phone call, and passing exchange, I was treated with dignity and respect. But I knew they really wished I would go away. We all knew that. My little renegade congregation wasn't making anyone's life easier with their “extraordinary ordination.”

In October, two weeks before the Bishop's Convocation, the Central States Synod's professional leaders' conference, I received a phone call from the bishop. He told me he wanted to convene a meeting between me and



any folk from the synod who might want to talk to me. That meeting would be held the first night of the Convocation. I told him I hadn't planned on attending the Convocation, since my ordination was two days later, and a lot of folks were coming in from out of town. My mother already had a plane ticket, and would be arriving during the Convocation.

I went to the Convocation. I actually have an above average respect for authority, and when a bishop asks me to do something, I am inclined to do it. Unless she or he is asking me to lie. I HAVE HAD PASTORS, SEMINARIANS, AND EVEN A CANDIDACY COMMITTEE ENCOURAGE ME TO LIE, BUT NEVER A BISHOP.

The Bishop's Convocation always begins on a Tuesday afternoon. At the end of the first session, the bishop announced that Donna Simon, who was serving Abiding Peace in Kansas City and was a candidate from the Extraordinary Candidacy Project roster, would be available after the session to meet with anyone who wished to meet with her. They set us up in a smallish room with about twenty-five chairs. As people arrived, more chairs were brought in, until there was no more room for chairs, and people just stood in the back, and the doorway.

There were friends there—people like Pastor Jayne Thompson, whom I had met while in seminary, and other pastors from Kansas City who had expressed their support, and even thrown an open house to welcome me in my first month in Kansas City. The supporters were the first to speak; I remember Pastor Jayne asking me to tell my story. Then the questions got more pointed. I made the mistake of saying that I knew there were lots of folks “struggling with the issue of gay ordination,” which allowed one pastor from rural Kansas to say “I’m not struggling. I THINK IT’S WRONG AND YOU SHOULDN’T BE HERE!”

For the next few years, I walked through every Bishop's Convocation and Synod Assembly knowing that many of the people I encountered believed I should not be there. It felt pretty lousy, but there were always supportive people nearby.

And things got better. In 2001, the ELCA decided to enter into an eight year “study” process. At the time, that felt like forever, but it was a good time, a generative time, for us as a church. In 2009, voting members at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly gave their approval to a policy which would allow for the rostering of gay and lesbian pastors in “publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” That’s PALMS, for those playing along at home.

That was a great day. Watching that count appear on the screen at the Minneapolis Convention Center was thrilling. REELING IN OUR JOY—AS WE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO DO BY PRESIDING BISHOP HANSON—WAS CHALLENGING. But we celebrated with quiet

hugs, many tears, and hands reaching upward as if we could touch the face of God.

That wasn't the moment when I knew things would be okay for queer Lutherans, though. No, that moment occurred a couple years earlier, at yet another Bishop's Convocation. A pastor whom I knew only by sight took me by the arm as we left morning prayer. “I want to talk to you,” he said, rather insistently. “Here it comes,” I thought.

We went into the empty Plenary room, and he turned to me, eyes burning into mine. “You know, I’ve always been on the opposite side of The Issue from you.” (It was not necessary to name The Issue—we both knew what he meant.) “And I still am.” I nodded.

“But you’ve been coming around here for a while now,” he continued. “And you’re kind of like an old shoe. We’re used to you. So I just want you to know that I THINK YOU SHOULD KEEP COMING.”

When I told friends about that encounter, they were often appalled. “He called you a *shoe*!?” But this is the heartland of America, and that was about the kindest thing a conservative pastor could say to me.

We will not always agree on everything. I daresay there are still a few people at any Synod Assembly or Bishop's Convocation who wish I had not arrived in their synod back in 2000. But we have learned to live together and to treat one another with dignity and respect, and even to love one another for what we bring to this amazing enterprise which is the Body of Christ. I am thankful for the presence of the Holy Spirit along every step of this journey—the Spirit who called me to this place, and the Spirit who speaks through my colleagues, among whom I’m just that old shoe in Kansas City.

The Rev. Donna Simon serves as pastor of St Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church in Kansas City, MO.

AWKWARD MOMENTS

Yes, there are still some awkward moments and people say strange things when they are nervous, fearful, or lack experience interacting with LGBTQ people. This is an attempt to find lightheartedness and humor in those awkward and sometimes painful moments.



When Jill and I went to our first synod assembly this spring we were practicing one on ones and an older gentleman pastor (probably in his 80s) was my partner. When he asked if I was married or single (always a fun question no matter your status), I replied, "Married, that is my wife, Jill, sitting behind us," and gestured to her. He looked at her and then back at me and then perplexedly looked between us again before exclaiming, "Oh! You're a lesbian group!" I was unsure what to reply besides, "Uh, sure."

—Gretchen Colby Rode,
First Call Candidate, Northfield, MN

I was asked recently by a call committee if I would call my husband my "partner" because it might be "easier" for the congregation. (We are legally married.)

—Rev. David Eck,
Abiding Savior Lutheran Church,
Fairview, NC



"All of the research indicates that it takes far longer than that for one to come to grips with his sexuality." I first heard this as suspicion about how settled and comfortable I seemed as a 31 year old who had come out from a marriage a mere 14 months prior. But in retrospect, I must acknowledge that this was actually just an awkward preface to an attempt to offer me support in whatever struggles I may have, especially as I would potentially begin a new call in a far away place.

—Rev. Paul Gibson,
Trinity Lutheran Church,
St Petersburg, FL



The psychiatrist the synod set up for the psychological evaluation told me that before entering seminary, I should “have random sexual encounters” in order to “get it out of my system.” She also wrote in her evaluation that I was “too intelligent” to “waste on the church.” She apparently had a low view of the church.

—Paul Johnson, Seminarian,
Wartburg Theological Seminary

A member of my internship congregation just happened to be visiting my home congregation. She struck up a conversation during coffee hour, complaining of the pregnant lesbian intern at her church, unaware she was on my home turf. The member of my home congregation immediately made the connection, stood up straight and declared, “That’s our member! We are so excited and proud of her, and we can’t wait until she’s a pastor!”

—Rev. Julie Boleyn,
Unity Lutheran Church, Berwyn, IL

“You’re not going to proclaim your sexuality, are you?”

—Emily E. Ewing, Christ the King
Lutheran Church, South Jordan, UT

When I asked the call committee how they lived out their RIC designation besides it being a statement in the bulletin, they told me they have a committee for that...ugh! Not exactly the answer I was looking for!

—David Eck,
Abiding Savior Lutheran Church,
Fairview, NC



The regional representative literally asked me at my approval interview if I had a “gay agenda” for the church.

—Rev. Erik Christensen,
St Luke’s Lutheran Church of
Logan Square, Chicago, IL

REV. SUSAN HALVOR—
I WILL WALK WITH YOU IN THE MARGINS—
MY DREAM JOB AS CHAPLAIN



I ACTUALLY REALIZED MY DREAM JOB WAS CHAPLAIN IN MY TWENTIES, while working with homeless women in recovery from substance abuse at Luther Place Shelter Ministries. That dream to be chaplain to homeless women got a little lost during my time in seminary, as I fell in love with parish ministry – preaching, worship leadership, the joys and challenges of serving a congregational community. So I became an associate pastor. After three years, I decided to come out to my congregation, which ended up being a very painful and divisive experience. I left that call and found myself revisiting that dream as I became a children’s hospital chaplain.

Now, ten years later, I’m struck by how strongly I feel called to ministry on the margins. At Providence Alaska Medical Center, we state that “As people of Providence, we reveal God’s love to all, especially the poor and vulnerable, through our compassionate service.”

Every day I walk with people whose lives are turned upside down by a cancer diagnosis, by the birth of an extremely premature baby, by a chronic illness or unexpected trauma. Every day I walk with people who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” whose experience with “church” has been one of judgment, hypocrisy, or rejection.

And every day I get to pray with people whose experience of church is one that would likely exclude me as a lesbian. But in those sacred moments at the hospital, we share our hope in

the same God. What I find is that as a lesbian in ministry as a chaplain, I PROVIDE AN ACCESS POINT FOR MANY WHO LONG FOR A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION BUT WILL LIKELY NEVER WALK THROUGH THE DOORS OF A CHURCH to meet that need.

When I first came to Anchorage and started meeting people in the LGBT community, I was struck first by their question of whether I was new to the state (because they'd never met me before ... Alaska is a small place, it turns out). But their follow up questions moved me more deeply: "Would I be welcome at your church?" "I love God, but can't go to church because I'm not welcome there." "I want my children to know God ... do you have any ideas? "

One day a health aide came up to me on the pediatric floor of the hospital, and said, "Someone told me I should talk to you." She told me that her partner is a woman, though most of the people she works with at the hospital don't know that. They have a new baby, as well as older children. They'd attended a non-denominational church, but when they asked about having their baby baptized, the pastors rejected them because they were a same-gender couple. It was a gift for me (and I hope for her) to be able to be a safe place at work for her. We talked about churches locally that would be more welcoming, and happy to baptize their baby. We also talked about supportive places for GLBT families to meet and find support together.

I appreciate that I become the safe listener for the nurse whose son is gay and going through

struggles. For the transgender patient who needs an advocate. For the chaplain resident who is trying to figure out how to be a better support for his lesbian sister as she struggles.

And in my Lutheran church community, I get to lift up the stories of diversity – cultural, religious, economic, and more – that I witness each day. I get to tell the stories of the "spiritual but not religious." I get to be the "go-to person" for questions about supporting LGBT members and families. And I get to share stories and experience around grief and loss, resilience, and communication across boundaries.

As we live in the paradox of saint and sinner, a people of hope and a people who live with death, I LOVE WHAT I DO. I love that I get to share the stories of brave and frightened people immersed in love. I love that I get to be a companion on the journey with people whose paths might otherwise never cross mine, from a variety of cultures, religious backgrounds, workplaces and life situations. The hope I find in the story of God's witness through Jesus' life, teaching, healing, death and resurrection, helps me find hope in my own experiences of grief, rejection and death. That hope, and those stories and experiences help me to strive to be a sign of that love and hope with others who struggle. What a tremendous privilege and joy to serve as a chaplain. God's work, our hands.

The Rev. Susan Halvor serves as Senior Chaplain at Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage, AK

THINGS WE'VE DONE "IN THE MEAN TIME" OR WHILE WAITING FOR A CALL

It is still harder for gifted and called LGBTQ leaders to find calls in the Lutheran church. We've had to get creative while we've waited. Here are some of those experiences.



I have several part-time jobs: I'm a chaplain, I do pulpit supply³, I teach adult education classes at church, and I work for a catering company. My partner Patty likes to remind me that I'm in the family business saying that, "Jesus was the ultimate caterer" at the wedding at Cana. Unfortunately, turning water into wine wasn't a skill they taught in seminary – although that would be an awesome elective!

—Julie Wright, First Call Candidate,
Cottage Grove, MN

I moved into a house with three other people that I found on craigslist, one of whom has become one of my now best and closest friends, while I worked part time at a machine shop.

—Rev. Paul Gibson,
Trinity Lutheran Church,
St Petersburg, FL

I worked at an Amazon Distribution Center during their peak season in Receiving. I got to know some of my coworkers and in the process they learned I was a pastor by trade and calling. They liked to make sure I got the boxes full of adult toys to receive into the warehouse. They especially liked watching me squirm over the big 'ones'. But it was the laughs with those who knew I was gay that made my day go by faster.

—Rev. David Coffman,
Agape Senior/ Agape Hospice,
Lead Bereavement Coordinator and a
Lead Volunteer Manager,
Columbia, SC

I'm spending the summer working for Youth in Mission at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, journeying as a mentor with youth leaders from across the country on cultural immersion trips.

—Rev. Emily E. Ewing, Christ the King
Lutheran Church, South Jordan, UT

Once I was removed from candidacy I returned to working with and for LGBTQ homeless youth as a community organizer ... a skill that ended up being critical to the call I eventually received at St. Luke's, which goes to show that, in God's economy, nothing is wasted.

— Rev. Erik Christensen,
St Luke's Lutheran Church of
Logan Square, Chicago, IL

³Pulpit supply: when a person is a guest preacher in a congregation, often when the regular pastor is away.

REV. LURA GROEN— THE JOY OF QUEER FAITH



Photo credit: Rob Martinez Photography

THERE IS NO JOY LIKE THE JOY OF THOSE WHO HAVE FOUGHT FOR THEIR FAITH, and now are playing in the heaven of the other side of that struggle. When that struggle is in community with others, and for justice for others that come after us, I feel a fearless, full-bodied, community-strengthened joy. This is my reality as a Queer person of faith, and as a Queer pastor in the ELCA.

Here is one glimpse of what that heaven looks like: one worship service at a Proclaim retreat. The worship is marked by the full-throated sound of 60 church leaders, lustily singing together the songs of our faith, our liberation. Worship leadership moves around the room like a living thing, a shared responsibility. At the center of the worship space is a large bowl of clear water, and we are invited to come forward to touch the water, to sprinkle it, as a

reminder to each other of our baptismal callings. A touch becomes a splash, a sprinkle becomes a two-handed water toss, and suddenly there was a full-fledged baptismal water fight, except fight isn't the right word, right in the middle of worship. A HUMAN BAPTISMAL WATER-PARK.

Could that moment have happened among straight pastors? Surely I believe it could. And yet it felt so very Queer. WE WORSHIPPED WITH OUR WHOLE BODIES, with joy, with freedom, with love for each other. With nothing held back in our spiritual life, except the water we lovingly re-directed away from the few who didn't want to get wet. (Consent is important to Queer pastors!) It was an abandon that comes only from having been set free.

That moment was formed in that community, that trust and love, and isn't exactly repeatable in a Sunday morning congregational worship. Greater care must be taken in our congregational worship for new people, and room must be made at the edges for those who are not yet ready to sing with the same vigor we did. As we invite more and more people into leadership, we allow for those who wish to follow. But SOMETHING OF THAT PLAY, THAT JOY, THAT ABANDON REMAINS.

My congregation dresses up to dance down the street at Pride Parades. My inner four-year-old comes out to play on Palm Sunday, when it's time to wave branches and shout. I dress in costumes; sometimes drag, for silly skits. We're experimenting with a Pentecost Pyro Party this spring. Easter Vigil is about

storytelling and drama. We dance, even when not all of us have club moves. (Some of us do.) We wear club clothes to church. Or jeans and flip-flops. Or church lady hats. We drink at a church Mardi Gras party. Or we don't, in solidarity with those in recovery. We tell jokes that maybe other churches might not tell.

Do other straight pastors do this with their congregations? Of course they do. But I do it from my Queer experience. I CAN BE VULNERABLE ENOUGH TO PLAY BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN LOVED by my Proclaim community. I can tell the truth and do justice work because I am accountable to them. I can sit with the fears and hurts and darkness of my congregation members because I have been there too.

MY STORY AS A QUEER PERSON OF FAITH, AS A QUEER PASTOR, IS A RESURRECTION STORY. I don't know what your story is. I'm sure it's different. But I hope it, too, has play. I hope your story, too, has life, and wholeness, and truth-telling, and justice-working community and glitter. I hope that your story, too, is a resurrection story.

Playfulness requires vulnerability. So does truth-telling, and justice work. In the security of being loved and accepted by my Proclaim community, I can speak more vulnerably to my congregation.

The Rev. Lura Groen serves as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Houston, TX.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE AS A PUBLICLY-IDENTIFIED LGBTQ PERSON IN THE CHURCH?



I don't know that it's a conscious choice for me- I use all of who I am in my ministry, and being Queer is one part of how God created me, one piece of what I naturally use. But I'm glad for being Queer- it's how God liberated me from a rules-based religion, and taught me grace. It's how I learned about discrimination, and can now work for justice for all kinds of other people. And it helps me connect with folks who are scared of the church for all kinds of reasons- showing them that I can be my full self in church invites them to think that maybe then can be too.

—Rev. Lura Groen,
Grace Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

I tell people that I am an African American, over 50 year old male, who is openly Gay. You cannot pick the parts of me you like. I come as a complete package created by God!

—Gus Barnes Jr., Seminarian,
Wartburg Theological Seminary

I do it because I promised myself I would never again live in the closet. And because some people don't know that a woman can be a pastor, let alone a queer woman and it's important that people can see themselves and people different from them as pastors.

—Rev. Emily E. Ewing,
Christ the King Lutheran Church,
South Jordan, UT



I naturally confuse folks in public when it comes to gender presentation, and that just seems to be a good opening for conversation. I'm also pretty easily excited about anything happening in the LGBTQIA2P communities and tend to be loud about things like buying Harvey Milk stamps or finally being able to attend my first Pride parade. I sometimes bring my OUT and Advocate with me to read in public, too, when I have office hours at the local coffee shops.

— Rev. Angela Joy Nelson,
Christ Our Emmanuel Lutheran
Church, Chatham, NY



For me it's about wholeness. It's about living with integrity--as in the word "integral" meaning "necessary to make the whole complete". My gender identity and sexuality cannot be separated from who I am in the world. When ministry is done well, people are inspired to live as the people that God has created them to be. I can't do this kind of ministry if I myself am not living into the fullness of life that God has called me to.

—Asher O'Callaghan, First Call Candidate, St Paul, MN

One of the reasons I publicly identify as being gay is because I publicly identify as being 100% human. God made 100% of me and if I am going to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, I need to share that God works through all of our life, not just parts of it. I used to be less upfront about my sexuality (like no one could immediately figure it out, right?), but have learned the hard way that the opposition will eventually make my sexuality an issue anyways. I now stand in public witness. I believe this gives God the glory and helps others who may be closeted to receive courage.

—Robin Fero, Seminarian, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

I'm up front about my sexuality. I have been completely honest with the congregation all throughout the call process, and I continue to be up front with people desiring to join the church. While I don't ask people if they might have a problem with a pastor's sexuality, I do it so that we can develop trust between each other. If I am not willing to be honest with members of my church or community, I feel like I can't ask the same of my members. Through this process, members of our church and new members have been up front about their sexuality, giving me insight that the LGBTQ community really is looking for a religious house of worship, especially being in a conservative belt on Long Island.

—Rev. Kevin O'Hara, Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Patchogue, NY

For me, it's been important to be publicly identified so that others can be publicly affirming. Usually I'm the only out LGBTQ person at my church, but some in the congregation have LGBTQ family members who have decided to leave religion altogether. One thing I've noticed is that by being out and proud I've helped them voice their support for their children, and LGBTQ equality in general. One new member joined because I was gay and she had a gay sister and wanted to go to a church that was inclusive of her whole family.

—Rev. Caleb Crainer, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, CA

I think for me the how is more in living my life as I would if I weren't a pastor... on internship I went to my parishioner's drag shows, participated in a fundraiser with church people called 'the running of the gays', rode my bike in the pride parade in clerics with my church, brought my partner to things...I just lived. I'm publicly identified as a white male which people can see, and I very publicly identify as a postmodern millennial which isn't so visible...it's important for people to understand where I'm coming from so that they can see where they might connect on a deeper level with me. Sometimes that's because of my sexuality, sometimes it's not. I've also preached several sermons where my sexuality was named, sometimes explicitly in an example of bullying, other times more subtly, like when I mentioned I was walking through Home Depot with Chris.

—Alex Raabe, First Call Candidate,
Denver, CO

In Lutheran church contexts when I casually say, "My wife is an Episcopalian," the people can't decide if they need to focus on the wife part or the Episcopal part. That's always fun.

—Rev. Brenda Bos,
Christ Lutheran Church,
San Clemente, CA



Most of the time, my publicly identifying as gay happens almost casually and in the midst of conversation that usually isn't even about sexuality. And that is because I am married and talking about family is a frequent thing. Being sensitive to the effect of language, I am discerning about my context as to whether I refer to Mo as my spouse or as my husband. Initially, I almost always begin with spouse which frequently leads to comments about my wife (or she) at which point I am able to gently correct by saying "he" in the midst of the conversation and, suddenly, I am publicly identified. It usually happens so fast and the conversation usually just continues on so that a sense is created that this reality does not need to be a dramatic or confrontational thing. It is part of my way of helping same-gendered marriages to become part of the "new normal" for society and for the church. I do not hide who I am or to whom I am married, but I also don't necessarily broadcast my situation either. For me personally, it is enough and often times better to strive in this way for a quiet witness. Of course, the quiet witness also grows naturally out of my Lutheran, Norwegian, Minnesotan background.

—Rev. Shawn Brandon,
Interim Pastor at Gloria Dei! Lutheran
Church, Arnold, MD

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, Redeemer, Sustainer, Lover,

You who have shared yourself with us through stories, through story-tellers, in our own flesh and blood incarnate,

You who have revealed your heart to us through poets and prophets and on a cross,

You who welcome the outcast, feed the hungry, and embrace the lonely,

You who have called us your own, who know us better than we know ourselves, who love us to the end:

We thank you. We adore you. We are mystified by you.

May these stories reach those who need them. May the tellers be blessed. May the readers be encouraged. May your name be praised, however we have come to call you: Eternal One, God who sees, Adonai, El Shaddai, our eternal home.

Amen.

SHORT GLOSSARY

Terms relating to sexual orientation and gender identity

Asexual: In its broadest sense, asexual describes individuals who are not sexually attracted to others or are not interested in sex. Those who identify as asexual may still be romantically attracted to others.

Bisexual: A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and/or relationally attracted to more than one sex and/or gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Because bisexual assumes a binary, female/male paradigm, some individuals now use the term pansexual or queer.

Gay: A word describing a person who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and/or relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

Gender Identity: One's innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the sex assigned at birth. Individuals are conscious of this between the ages 18 months and 3 years. Many people develop a gender identity that matches their biological sex. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their biological or assigned sex. Some of these individuals choose to socially, hormonally and/or surgically change their sex to more fully match their gender identity.

Gender Expression: Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way as people assign gender to others based on their appearance, mannerisms, and other gendered characteristics. Sometimes, transgender people seek to match their physical expression with their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Gender expression should not be viewed as an indication of sexual orientation.

Genderqueer: A word people use to describe their own non-normative gender identity or expression.

Gender Role: This is the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Many cultures recognize two basic gender roles: masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). People who step out of their socially assigned gender roles are sometimes referred to as transgender. Some cultures have three or more gender roles.

Intersex: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and/or relationally attracted to other women.

LGBTQ/IA2P: A long acronym that includes: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, pansexual. LGBTQ is often used as shorthand to refer to a variety of people with diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities.

Queer: Anyone who chooses to identify as such. This can include, but is not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual people, and even straight people. This term has different meanings to different people. Some find it offensive, while others reclaim it to encompass the broader sense of history of the gay rights movement. It can also be used as an umbrella term like LGBTQ, as in “the queer community.”

Sexual orientation: Sexual orientation is an enduring personal quality that inclines people to feel romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of another sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to all sexes or more than one gender.

Transgender/Trans*: Sometimes used as an umbrella to describe anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. More narrowly defined, it refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth sex. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (attraction to people of a specific gender.) Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.

Transsexual: Individuals who do not identify with their birth-assigned sex and physically alter their bodies surgically and/or hormonally. This physical transition is a complicated, multi-step process that may take years and may include, but is not limited to, sex reassignment surgery. Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) is a term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person’s “sex”. Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, have SRS. While this procedure is often referred to as a sex change operation in popular culture, SRS is the preferred term. Some use the term Sex-Affirming Surgery.

Two-Spirit: a term chosen to distinctly express Native/First Nations gender identity and gender variance.

Additional definitions of terms related to sexuality and gender can be found here:

www.hrc.org/resources/entry/glossary-of-terms

www.genderspectrum.org

www.tolerance.org/LGBT-best-practices-terms

www.thegenderbook.com

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FOR LGBTQ ROSTERED LEADERS IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

- 1987 Three openly gay seminary students at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Joel Workin, Jeff Johnson, Jim Lancaster) are approved for ministry by their respective church bodies. The students are later declared ineligible for official ordination because all three refuse to state whether or not they intend to remain celibate. Classmate Greg Egertson also came out at this time, making this group the “Berkely Four.”
- 1989 The Lutheran church officially establishes guidelines that “practicing homosexuals” are to be excluded from ordained ministry.
- January 20, 1990 First extraordinary ordinations of gay and lesbian persons. St Francis Lutheran Church and First United Lutheran Church, two San Francisco congregations, proceed with the ordination of gay and lesbian candidates Ruth Frost, Phyllis Zillhart, and Jeff Johnson. After the ordinations the ELCA brings official charges against the two congregations.
- 1990 The ELCA's Church Council drafts a document called “Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA” that, among other things, states that homosexual ordained ministers are “expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relations.”
- July 1990 The two San Francisco churches are officially suspended by a disciplinary committee of the ELCA for ordaining openly gay ministers who did not take a vow of celibacy. The committee also suggests an “extensive study” of homosexuality and ordination.
- 1990 Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM) formed to support ministry by gay and lesbian pastors.
- 1993 The Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) formed to provide an alternative candidacy and credentialing process for LGBTQ candidates in the ELCA who would not agree to the mandated, lifelong celibacy requirement for gay and lesbian pastors.
- 1994 A regional panel of the ELCA votes to defrock Oakland pastor, Rev. Ross Merkel, after he announces that he is gay. This marks the first trial of an openly gay pastor in the denomination.
- August 1999 The Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA, the major legislative body, officially votes for the first time on the issue of gay clergy. In a vote of 820 to 159, “sexually-active” gay and lesbian people are prohibited from ordination.
- 2002 Sharon Stalkfleet, first openly bisexual person ordained extraordinarily.
- 2006 Megan Rohrer, first openly transgender pastor ordained extraordinarily.
- 2007 Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries and Extraordinary Candidacy Project merge to form Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries.
- 2007 100 Lutheran pastors officially come out at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Chicago.
- 2009 In the period between January 1990 and January 2009, 18 people are ordained extraordinarily.
- 2009 ELCA church policy changes, removing the mandate of lifelong celibacy for gay and lesbian pastors.

- July 20, 2010 ELCA receives first extraordinarily ordained pastors onto its roster via the Rite of Reception.
- 2011 Proclaim, the professional community for publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders, candidates, and seminarians, officially launches.
- Feb 27, 2011 St. Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco, CA rejoins the ELCA through a Festival of Reconciliation and Restoration.
- October 14, 2012 First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco, CA rejoins the ELCA through a Service of Healing & Reconciliation.
- 2013 First openly gay ELCA bishop elected and installed. Bishop Guy Erwin, also the ELCA's first Native American bishop, from the Osage Nation, becomes bishop of the Southwest California Synod.
- 2014 175 publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders are part of the growing Proclaim community, proclaiming God's love and seeking justice for all.
- 2015 Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries celebrates twenty-five years of extraordinary ministry by LGBTQ leaders.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION

Are you an LGBTQ person who is considering ministry or a current seminarian? Or are you a Lutheran rostered LGBTQ leader looking for community or other resources for your ministry? Or are you part of a congregation discerning opening your call process to LGBTQ leaders? Check out our website at www.elm.org.

A few resources available on our website:

- *The Mysteries of the Ages: ELM's Unofficial Guide for LGBTQ First Call Candidates*
- *Candidacy and LGBTQ Individuals: An offered resource for ELCA candidacy committees*
- *Enrich & Transform: Welcoming LGBTQ Candidates into the Call Process* – A guide for call committees

You are welcome to copy this resource in whole or part. When doing so, please credit ELM as the source and please include the introduction, glossary, timeline, and credit page.

To learn more or get involved:

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