

Holy Cross Puts its Inclusive Welcome Into Action!



On April 2, 2006, Holy Cross Lutheran Church took a bold step and became the first congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to welcome an openly queer-identified Vicar to serve a yearlong internship.

Lionel Ketola, M.Div., is an endorsed candidate for ordained ministry with the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP), an activist organization which certifies the credentials of openly lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender candidates for ordained ministry in Lutheran Churches. The ECP is a hopeful alternative for openly queer people who wish to serve in public ministry and refuse to comply with the ELCIC's unjust policy that requires that sexual minority pastors remain celibate or hide their sexual orientations and relationships from church officials.

Lionel began his candidacy process with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 1985. The first openly gay seminary student in the ELCIC, Lionel's friends still remember seminary Christmas banquets where he and his boyfriend danced together.

After coming out to his bishop Lionel's internship site was cancelled in 1987 and he faced the prospect of being dropped from the master of divinity program at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Saskatoon. While Lionel was eventually allowed to finish his degree, Lionel's openness regarding his sexual orientation resulted ELCIC removing his endorsement as a candidate for ordination in 1988.

For the next fourteen years, Lionel worked in the non-profit sector with a variety of social service organizations, and retrained to work as an expressive art therapist. After learning about the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) through a friend, Lionel, who'd been sensing the spirit's nudge to once again risk pursuing the call to ministry, made application to the ECP and was endorsed as a candidate for ordination in April 2004.

Having already completed his seminary education, all that remained was completion of an internship in order to advance to the approval phase of the ECP candidacy process. Finding a placement became a two-year project for Lionel, who spoke with many congregations to find one that would be willing to serve as an internship site for an openly gay candidate who was not in an ELCIC approved candidacy process.

In 2005 Lionel approached Holy Cross Lutheran Church just north of Toronto, Ontario. In the process of consideration, the congregation realized its commitment to justice extended beyond Lionel's internship. Their grant application to LLGM stated: "The Council of Holy Cross sees our congregation's efforts as a witness to the ELCIC as well as to the communities in which we serve. It is our hope that Lionel's internship at Holy Cross will mark the beginning of a Canadian ECP. However, as a small mission congregation, these hopes would go unrealized without the external financial support needed to enable Lionel to set aside a year to complete his internship."

Following notification in January that Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM) had approved funding for the internship, Holy Cross immediately moved ahead with plans for Lionel's internship. On Sunday, February 12, the congregation took its final vote to call Lionel to a one-

year internship beginning April 1st. “Without the support of LLGM our internship proposal could not have become a reality,” said Lionel.

As Lionel’s internship draws to a conclusion on April 1, 2007, Lionel commented that this year of internship ministry has “served as a reminder that we at Holy Cross don’t walk this road alone - but rather, we walk it surrounded by an amazing cloud of supporters and witnesses who are all urging our Lutheran church forward towards a wider embrace of ALL God’s people!” Lionel adds, “Beyond this wonderful internship year, Holy Cross will continue to find ways to carry out its ministry of radical hospitality and providing a safe space for all who have been hurt by the church. Holy Cross is a vibrant Gospel-centered and justice-seeking congregation and a great place to call home!”

Lionel and his husband Steve Loweth, a 42-year-old music publisher, were married on New Years Eve 2003. Steve is active in leadership in a downtown Toronto congregation of the Anglican Church of Canada.



Gathering following the April 2, 2006 Installation Service

