



Holy Cross Lutheran Church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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May 12, 2008

The Reverend Michael Pryse
Bishop, Eastern Synod ELCIC
74 Weber Street West
Kitchener, ON N2H 3Z3

Dear Bishop Pryse:

Thank you for your letter of April 30, 2008 counseling us with regard to the call our congregation has issued to candidate Lionel Ketola.

We have prayerfully and respectfully considered your exhortation and admonition to refrain from proceeding with the ordination of Lionel Ketola on May 16, 2008 and the various reasons you give for not proceeding. We must respectfully inform you of our congregation's intention to faithfully disobey the policies of the ELCIC, which discriminate against candidates who qualify for ordination but are excluded purely on the basis of their being gay or lesbian. In our considered opinion these policies stand in direct contradiction to the Gospel we proclaim and seek to live out as a community and in our various callings.

We recognize that our actions constitute a serious breach of those policies. We are also mindful of the consequences that you clearly outlined to our congregation prior to the congregational vote to proceed with the call and ordination. We have also waited for decades and watched as people have suffered the indignities of a policy that forces qualified candidates to remain silent, or to live in isolation, or to live a lie, or in despair, or to deny God's call. We have worked diligently on the floor of assemblies and conventions only to see fear prevail over grace. Sadly, many of our sisters and brothers, both straight and gay or lesbian, have lost hope and left the ELCIC. We have listened to our own young people insist that our failure to treat one another as equals is an injustice that they want no part of. In response to the ELCIC's expressed desire to be a Church in Mission for Others, we feel it would be disingenuous of us to reach out to others before first addressing those members who are already among us who are seeking full inclusion in our life together as the Body of Christ.

It is for reasons such as these that Holy Cross has proceeded, slowly, prayerfully, and deliberately, in making our decision to call Lionel to serve as our Associate Pastor. In Lionel we see a candidate who is well qualified for ministry. He received a Master of Divinity degree from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon in 1990. His honesty about his sexual orientation led to his exclusion from the candidacy processes of the ELCIC. Lionel then went on to achieve a Diploma in Arts Therapy and went to work in the field of chaplaincy. From March of 2006 to 2007, Lionel served a one-year internship at Holy Cross that was supervised by the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) has approved Lionel for ordination. ELM is a para-church organization that maintains a roster of Lutheran candidates who qualify for call, but are currently excluded from the processes of the ELCA and ELCIC solely on the basis of their sexual identity. As a result of ELM's rigorous credentialing program, Lionel has been examined and re-examined using the criteria of the ELCIC, the ELCA, and the ELM. It is a testimony to his faithfulness that unlike so many others who have given up along the way, he has persisted year after year in following God's call to serve in ordained ministry.

We do not take these actions lightly. We also understand that we are accountable to the whole ELCIC. We are prepared to accept whatever consequences our sisters and brothers in Christ deem appropriate. Our intention is not *"to do irreparable damage to the already fragile connecting fabric of our church,"* as you fear might be the result. But rather to provide a glimmer of hope to our sisters and brothers in the ELCIC who are struggling to stay in communion with a church whose policies discriminate against them.

Lionel Ketola is qualified for ordination. That he is also a happily married man makes it impossible for him to deny that he is gay or to pretend that he lives alone. He has chosen to be open and honest about who he is. We at Holy Cross have found Lionel to be blessed with gifts and talents that we believe our church needs at this particular time. We believe that calling and ordaining Lionel is a faithful response to the prodding of the Holy Spirit.

As Bishop, you have a unique responsibility to look to the good order of the Church and we understand and respect the fact that you are bound by the policies of the church. We trust that you together with our sisters and brothers in the Eastern Synod will respect our understanding of the Gospel and our seeking to follow Christ's example of inclusivity,

We are not so arrogant as to believe that we alone know what is best. Moving forward without the full support of the ELCIC may not be the right course of action at this particular time. But we have prayed together, worked together, struggled together, and decided together to call Lionel to ordained ministry. And so, we choose to faithfully disobey trusting that, if we err, we err on the side of grace For as the Apostle Paul teaches: because we have been baptized into Christ, *"there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer enslaved or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."* We look forward to the day when all the baptized are free to respond to God's call to ordained ministry.

We pray that our faithfulness will provide hope to our sisters and brothers in the ELCIC who seek justice and reconciliation as together we continue to strive to be the Church in Mission for Others.

We remain, yours in Christ!

Members of the Church Council of Holy Cross Lutheran Church

per

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Maryann Doherty

Richard Payne

Richard Payne

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Cheryl Sprakman

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Dawn Hutchings

The Reverend Dawn Hutchings, Pastor

cc: Eastern Synod Pastors and Diaconal Ministers
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