

## **For Immediate Release**

March 8, 2007

### **Pastor Schmeling Appeals The Decision Of The ELCA Hearing Committee**

Pastor Bradley Schmeling has appealed the decision of the Hearing Committee in the hearing conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Southeastern Synod.

The appeal is in line with the statements of the Hearing Committee, given in their findings, that the policy precluding homosexual pastors in loving, committed relationships from the ministry of the church may violate the Constitution of the ELCA and that one of the venues for changing the policy was an appeal to the ELCA Committee on Appeals.

The hearing of Pastor Bradley took place in Atlanta, January 19-24, on charges of conduct incompatible with the ministerial office because he is in a loving, committed same-gender relationship with Pastor Darin Easler.

The decision of the Hearing Committee, released on February 8, 2007, said that they found "with near unanimity,"

- "that there is nothing about Pastor Schmeling's acknowledged and stipulated homosexual relationship that would impede the proclamation of the Gospel or the right administration of the sacraments."
- that if the decision were only by the standards of the ELCA Constitution, they would find "that Pastor Schmeling is not engaged in conduct that is incompatible with the ministerial office, and would find with near unanimity that no discipline of any sort should be imposed against him."
- that Pastor Schmeling "is recognized as an innovative worship leader and has been called upon by the synod to plan and organize worship at two synod assemblies."
- that "the trends in congregation membership, in worship attendance and in stewardship at St. John's also suggest that Pastor Schmeling has had the support of the vast majority of the congregation from the very beginning."

In its findings, the committee expressed nearly unanimous concern that the church's policies on pastors in same-gender relationships "are at least bad policy, and may very well violate the constitution and bylaws of this church," and called for the ELCA to change the policy.

The committee said in its findings that there was a second way to have the policy changed: in addition to appealing the decision to the Committee on Appeals based on the unconstitutionality of the policy, the issue could also be brought before the August 6-12, 2007, Churchwide Assembly (the highest legislative body in the ELCA). This is accomplished by passing resolutions at synod assemblies preceding that Chicago meeting, asking the Churchwide Assembly to change the policy.

Finally, the committee said that it was bound by the current policy, and, in a 7-5 vote, determined that Pastor Bradley is to be removed from the roster of ELCA clergy on August 15, 2007, unless the ELCA changes its policy or the Committee on Appeals finds it unconstitutional.