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Contact: Beth Cope, 404-786-0503
404-214-6767

Pastor Bradley Schmeling Removed from Clergy Roster Immediately by Action of Appeals Committee

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Committee on Appeals has denied the appeal of Pastor Bradley Schmeling and removed him from the clergy roster, effective July 2, 2007.

The Committee on Appeals said that Bradley's removal was effective immediately with this decision, since the Discipline Hearing Committee (DHC) had no authority to delay the implementation of its February decision further than the end of the appeals process. The DHC had delayed the removal from the clergy roster until August 15. And, the Committee on Appeals said that the DHC had exceeded its authority by suggesting that the policy might violate the ELCA constitution, and further by suggesting ways to change the policy.

This decision by the Committee on Appeals will be reported to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly, which will, as they said, provide "the opportunity for revision of the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions by the Churchwide Assembly or of the other documents governing the discipline process by the Church Council, if such be the will of this church."

Pastor Bradley said, "I'm deeply disappointed by the decision, although I'm not surprised. Change has always proven difficult for the church. I continue to hope that the church will be centered in God's message of love, compassion, and justice, rather than in the enforcement of discriminatory policies. The church can only resist the Holy Spirit for so long. In the meantime, I plan to continue to follow my call in ministry at St. John's and to pray for the day when all God's children are equally welcomed into the Lutheran church."

John Ballew, president of St. John's congregation, said, "St. John's is going to stay St. John's. Church service this and every Sunday is at 10:30 am. We are going to go to Churchwide Assembly in August, to witness to our ELCA the costs of this decision, based on an absurd policy. This is not just about us and our wonderful pastor; this is about all those called to minister to God's people, who lead exemplary lives, who provide a model for faithful, loving companionship with each other and with Christ."

Bradley Schmeling is pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Atlanta, Georgia. He was charged in 2006 with a violation of the ELCA policy for living in a committed, loving same-gender relationship with his life-partner, Pastor Darin Easler. The current policy of the ELCA prohibits the service of so-named "practicing homosexuals" from the ministry of the church. An ecclesiastical trial was held in January 2007 – the result of which was the decision of the DHC to remove him from the clergy roster effective August 15.

The DHC also said that its nearly unanimous view was that the policy may violate the constitution of the ELCA, and suggested two paths to remove the policy: through the Committee on Appeals as a judicial matter and through legislation to change the policy at a churchwide assembly, the highest legislative body of the church.

The Hearing Committee also said that, based on its examination of Pastor Bradley and his ministry at St. John's Lutheran, there was no basis in the ELCA constitution for punishing Pastor Bradley and that his ministry was excellent.

ABOUT

St. John's Lutheran Church is a congregation that invites freely, loves unconditionally, and serves with joy. It is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, www.stjohnsatlanta.org.