

Pastor Bradley E. Schmeling
STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS, July 5, 2007

I'm disheartened that the Committee on Appeals would remove me from the roster without ever meeting me; without meeting the people of St. John's Lutheran Church; or without even coming to Atlanta to experience our congregation at work in the neighborhood. Their decision was made on paper, not face to face.

I'm afraid this confirms what so many think about that church; that it's a bureaucracy that's more interested in following rules than it is witnessing to the compassionate love of God. I'm ashamed that this document comes from the denomination that I have served for the last twenty years. I would have hoped that it might have, at least, mentioned Jesus or offered to pray for me and for this congregation.

I want my denomination to witness to the Jesus that I know and love; a savior who is more interested in relationships more than in rules. I think that has always been the heart of the Lutheran message: God is, first and foremost, a gracious and loving God. God isn't a heartless judge.

So I'm sad today; sad that the ELCA didn't do the compassionate thing; sad that the journey for justice goes on longer.

But I'm also encouraged; encouraged by the love of this congregation; encouraged by our determination to continue to be faithful participants in the church; encouraged that the ELCA will have a chance to change the policy once and for all in Chicago.

St. John's Lutheran Church has been an amazing community to serve. We have been growing and thriving these last seven years, and I expect that we will continue to do that. The congregation issued their call to me in 2000, and as far as we're concerned, that call has not changed. The good news for today is that we can now return to the ministry and mission that we have been called to do. We're going to continue to welcome everybody who comes through our doors; to work in our city for justice; to teach our children the Bible; and to be a faithful and loving voice in the larger church.

Thank you very much.