

# TOOLS FOR ACTION

*from the Southeast Michigan Synod Church in Society Committee*

## DIVERSITY TASK FORCE TIMELINE

- 1988 By synod assembly action a Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Concerns was formed with this charge: "The role of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force will be to develop a process by which members of the...synod can study, reflect and share personally about ministry to and with gay and lesbian persons, developing appropriate materials and resources for the ongoing dialogue within the church." For two years the task force studied such issues as the role and authority of Scripture in defining church policy, the basis for distinguishing between orientation and action in the genital expression of sexuality, and the grounds by which changes are made in current church policy.
- 1990 The Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Concerns and the Task Force on Biblical Authority reported to Synod Assembly. Study materials were provided to all congregations. It is estimated that over 80% of rostered leaders and more than 50% of SEMS congregations engaged in serious study on this issue between the 1990 and 1991 synod assemblies.
- 1992 "The Affirmation of Welcome" was adopted by an 84% majority at synod assembly, making the Southeast Michigan Synod the sixth synod of the ELCA to become a Reconciled in Christ synod.
- 1996 A resolution was adopted at synod assembly reaffirming the 1992 action of our synod adopting the "Affirmation of Welcome" as well as the 1991 action of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly that "gay and lesbian people as individuals created by God are welcome to participate fully in the life of congregations of the ELCA."
- 2000 Resolution 3 was adopted at synod assembly permitting pastors to preside at blessings of same sex unions – an action that had in fact been happening for some time. This resolution simply acknowledged and allowed it. A series of Bishop's Symposia on Homosexuality in the Church was held, including presentations by Dr. Mark A. Powell, Dr. Marc Kolden and former ELCA Bishop Dr. Herbert Chilstrom.
- 2001 The synod assembly rescinded Resolution 3 of the 2000 assembly and adopted Resolution D: "That the Southeast Michigan Synod recognize that faithful people differ in their positions on the blessing of committed same-sex unions but does not believe that these differences negate the unity we have in Jesus Christ. That since we are not of one heart and mind on the practice of blessing committed same sex unions, we will leave the decision whether or not to bless such unions to local pastoral discretion in consultation with the congregation's leadership. That we will continue to be a community on the way together in our discernment as we struggle to be a welcome place for all of God's people while remaining faithful to the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions and our interdependent mission as the ELCA." The assembly further adopted Resolution E requesting that the synod memorialize the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to call for the development of a

- social statement on sexuality, including guidelines for synods and congregations on whether or not we as a church should bless same sex unions and whether or not the church's ordination standards should be changed.
- 2002 Congregations of the synod were urged to engage in study and dialogue on sexuality and homosexuality using the ELCA documents "Journey Together Faithfully" leading up to the projected 2005 churchwide assembly action.
- 2004 The synod assembly adopted the following resolution put forward by newly re-elected Bishop Robert Rimbo: "We are facing anxious times in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as we seek to discern God's will and way with regard to the blessing of same sex unions and the ordination of candidates in such committed relationships. We are able to face these times with grace and courage because of the gifts God has given us in Holy Baptism - we live in unbroken unity with God, given by Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit, and we are called to proclaim that good news to all the world. Human sexuality is a gift from God – mysterious, ambiguous, and subject to the brokenness of our fallen world – and our faithful conversations about this gift must continue and deepen. Therefore, as your bishop I propose the following resolution for your consideration: That the Southeast Michigan Synod, meeting in assembly, declares that: + our unity as the assembly gathered around the Word and the Sacraments cannot be broken by differing perspectives on human sexuality + the power and promise of Christ's death and resurrection are sufficient to hold us in such unity even as we disagree on various issues + we continue to advocate for a church that lives in the creative tension of already being one in Christ and not yet fully being what God would have us be + we will bear witness to all the world that when deep disagreements arise among the people of God we will strive for alternatives to division, and + we will continue to cling to the truth that there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father' and we will trust in this God."
- 2006 The task force adopted a new name and a mission statement: "The Diversity Task Force for GLBTQI Concerns is committed to justice and full inclusion of all God's people within our congregations, the Southeast Michigan Synod and the ELCA through education, support, advocacy and faith!"
- 2007 As a result of the verdict in the Bradley Schmeling case, the synod assembly adopted a resolution to memorialize the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to "encourage restraint in all matters of discipline...of rostered leaders and congregations except in cases that involve abuse or the misuse of power" and "that the bishops of the church be encouraged to work through pastoral care, consultation and admonition before filing discipline charges that would seek among other things removal of a rostered leader or congregation that seeks to lift up issues of justice in a spirit of benevolence."
- 2008 The task force adopted a new name: The Diversity Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression. The task force participated in the churchwide hearing on the draft social statement on human sexuality and presented a response relative to the process of formulating this statement.
- 2010 The task force produced a brochure and resource card, presented a standing room only workshop at the Joint Synod Assembly, sent letters to congregational leaders and clergy offering resources and encouragement in light of the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, and added information on the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program to the Southeast Michigan Synod website.