

# ELCA Church Council seeks clarity

BY SONIA C. SOLOMONSON

**T**he ELCA Church Council at its April 9-12 meeting voted—with no opposition noted—to recommend to the Churchwide Assembly an addition to the Lutheran/Episcopal full communion proposal: “In adopting this document, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church specifically acknowledge and declare that it has been correctly interpreted by the resolution of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted at Tucson, Ariz., March 8, 1999.”

In offering the motion for the addition to “Called to Common Mission,” Dale Sandstrom, Bismarck, N.D., said, “[The bishops’ interpretation] then becomes a binding part of the agreement, not merely an interpretation. Let’s be clear and state it.”

The bishops’ resolution contains 20 points as their understandings of CCM, including:

- “No requirement that the ELCA must eventually adopt the threefold order of ministry.”
- “No requirement that ELCA bishops be elected to serve as synodical bishops for life.”
- “Ordinations of pastors will continue to be held at synodical worship services and in congregations, as is the present pattern.”
- “Pastors of the ELCA will continue to preside at confirmations.”

After nearly two hours of discussion, council members earlier in their meeting had voted not to “adopt” the bishops’ document but only to “receive and transmit” it to the Churchwide Assembly. Discussion centered on what message would be sent to ELCA members if the council adopted the bishops’ document.

“If we adopt this, it will be seen as an endorsement,” said Linda Brown, Moorhead, Minn.

“Other information I’ve seen [on CCM] hasn’t been subjected to as much scrutiny as this document,” said David Hagen, Dearborn, Mich. “I find it strange that we wouldn’t want to distribute something the bishops approved and the ecumenical office OK’d.” (Both the ELCA and the Episcopal Church ecumenical offices found “no disagreement” with the bishops’ document.)

“We as council members have found this document helpful,” said Karen Parker, Huntington Beach, Calif. “I call us to take this leadership role because others are taking leadership.”

A motion by Susan Engh, Wayzata, Minn., directing that equal time and representation for pro and con expres-

sions be given at synod assemblies and other gatherings of Churchwide Assembly voting members failed 26-5.

Council members reaffirmed their April 1998 resolution urging that discussion, education and prayer leading to the full communion decision in August be “conducted with honesty, mutual respect and pastoral care.”

In related actions churchwide, CCM has been endorsed by the faculty of The Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia and by the bishops of Region 7 and Region 8.

The full communion proposal will come to the Churchwide Assembly during its Aug. 16-22 gathering in Denver. **W**

*Solomonson is managing editor of The Lutheran.*

## Other council action

**C**hurch Council members spent two hours discussing an interunit report relating to homosexuality that will be brought to the Churchwide Assembly in August. “This report is helpful,” said Larry Smoose, Media, Pa. “This issue is divisive, but we have no timeline and no plans of how to deal with this issue. I want to move the conversations—and they need to be done in safe and civil ways.”

Smoose proposed a resolution that asked in part for a timeline for creation of a social statement. That and several other parts of the resolution were defeated because several council members felt the church has too many pressing issues now.

“I come from a location that feels off balance right now. Vertigo is not a good position to be in,” said David Johnson, Fargo, N.D. “If we want this to fail, we should push it now. I question whether we’re ready for this.”

“Does anybody have sexuality right?” asked Franklin D. Fry, Summit, N.J. “We are all fallen sinners. We should be saying, ‘Nobody has it right; now what?’”

Bishop Allan Bjornberg, Rocky Mountain Synod, said, “I sense a struggle on the council, and it seems to be one of timing and what I’ll call ‘congregational saturation.’ Maybe next fall would be a better time to address this.”

The council voted that resources from the divisions for Church in Society and Outreach on this issue be available to congregations upon request. The council plans further discussion on the topic at future meetings.

In other action, the council voted to:

- **Recommend** that the Churchwide Assembly adopt the economic life statement.
- **Allocate** funds for projects with the poor and for special ministries such as ethnic leadership development, anti-racism and the ELCA Identity Public Media project. These funds will come from reserves, which have exceeded goals. “This shows our institution has ears [to hear about the needs] but also has a heart,” said Robert Dasher, Columbia, S.C.
- **Declare** ELCA congregations “safe havens” for children and pay special attention to children who are hungry, homeless, abused, lonely and subject to violence.
- **Ask** the Churchwide Assembly to double the annual income (to \$25 million) raised through the World Hunger Appeal within the next five years. **W**