

# Dispatches



## From the Front

### Another Ecumenical Railroad

In an October 23, 1995 news release, Bishop Anderson announced his desire for "*an open discussion of all ecumenical proposals coming before the 1997 Churchwide Assembly.*" About the same time, he announced that he supports the LWF Lutheran/Catholic proposal to lift the 16th century condemnations. The ELCA bishops announced at their November 1995 meeting that they agree with Anderson. Is no discussion needed?

Maybe Bishop Anderson and the ELCA bishops simply are not aware of the problems of this proposal. They may not know because of the secretive ways of the ELCA Department for Ecumenical Affairs. Note:

- The LWF Lutheran/Catholic proposal is not public.
- The names of the ELCA team drafting a response to the proposal are not public.
- The two 1995 drafting meetings have not been reported in the press.
- The drafting team's response is not public.

Why all this secrecy? Would the proposal fail if it were exposed to the light of day?

There's more. The previous ELCA administration agreed to an LWF plan to have LWF member churches give a simple "Yes" or "No" answer to the proposal to lift the condemnations, rather than a nuanced response.

Meanwhile, in 1994 the VELKD (the German version of the ELCA, only it represents *15 million* Lutherans, 1/4 of the LWF) adopted in convention a critical "*complex Opinion*" to the proposal to lift the condemnations (see The Lutheran Quarterly, Autumn 1995, pp. 359-64.). It may be that the LWF is trying to get around the critical German response by having other Lutheran churches give a Yes/No vote, trusting that assembly delegates, wanting to be nice but not really understanding the issues, will vote Yes.

This would not be such a big deal if it were merely a matter of saying that the condemnations do not apply. But the 1997 Assembly will be asked to do more, to agree to "*a joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic affirmation of the main content of the doctrine of justification*" (ELCA Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Occasional Papers, 10/95, p.15).

This is a very different and serious matter as our German Lutheran colleagues point out. "*Open discussion*" would be a welcome change; but, as it stands, the skids are greased for the 1997 Assembly to give a simple Yes vote.

### Seminarian Heads ELCA Division

Wyvette Bullock is the new head of the Division for Congregational Ministries. Bullock, a former Baptist, is going to seminary to become an ordained Lutheran. She is intelligent and congenial. But a seminarian to head an ELCA Division?

Bullock is responsible for guiding the ELCA through the mine field of a new sacramental practices statement. Is it good for the church to have a seminarian do this? How does she know when other ELCA staff and task force members are pushing liturgical practices which are at odds with Lutheran theology? (Luther, even after a life-time of preaching and teaching, considered the art of distinguishing law and gospel difficult to master.)

How has this come about? Bullock is a black woman. Under the quota system, that's trump. Despite her administrative strengths, is it in the church's best interests to entrust this important division to one with limited theological training?

Meanwhile, the ELCA is wasting many capable middle-aged pastors who should be leading the church through these difficult issues. You see, they are just the wrong sex and race, and that's what counts. Quotas seem to have become a substitute for discernment in selecting our leaders.

### Laypeople "Cannot" Minister to Pastors

So says Bishop Howard Wennes of the Grand Canyon Synod and his leadership committee of six pastors and one AIM. Their report, Toward a Ministerium: An Assessment of the Terrain, a Compass Reading, and an Invitation to the Adventure, (wordy title, your eminences), says "*Pastors and associates in ministry need to belong to a community where they are nurtured and challenged. This community cannot be the congregation they serve.\**" This statement is explained further in a footnote: "*'Cannot' underscores the inability of a congregation to provide objective support and candor in spite of its own desire to do so.*" The first five pastors to whom we showed this statement vigorously disagreed and gave examples of how they had been nurtured and challenged by people in their congregations. Fortunately, the Grand Canyon provides plenty of space for piling this stuff.

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