

FIRST TOWN HALL LISTENING MEETING
Sunday, September 15, 2019
Heinrich Hall
12:00 Noon

61 in attendance

Opening: the meeting began at 12 noon. Kathy Reynolds, Council President, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. She stated that the chairs are arranged in a circle to signify we are one family. We are here because of recent actions taken by the ELCA at the Triennial Churchwide Assembly held in Milwaukee in August of 2019. We have allotted an hour for this forum, but we will stay until every person is heard.

Kathy will bring the microphone to everyone so that they can be heard. She requested that each speaker state their name before speaking. This Town Hall Meeting is an opportunity for the members present to share their concerns and questions so that this information can be relayed to the current members of church Council. Kathy stated that she is proud that we are a diversified congregation, hence there are divergent thoughts and opinions. We are here today to listen to each other, not to persuade.

Ken Fetter asked: What exactly did the ELCA put out? Kathy stated that Pastor was more versed. Kathy stated that the Triennial Churchwide assembly was held in Milwaukee and where resolutions were passed, called memorials. This memorial concerning sanctuary was brought up from the floor. In lay terms; to communicate to the world that the ELCA walks with all who need our assistance as immigrants. **Ken asked:** immigrants: Legal or illegal? This issue is not clear and was not vetted by the church assembly as this issue came from the floor. It will be studied for 2 years. Each congregation has the opportunity to express our love for our fellow man in each community. Our church is not asking us to do anything illegal.

Tami Kuhlmann: Asked if we were going to read the entire statement. Kathy stated that it has been out since August, but Barbara stated that she will provide more hard copies.

Pastor Klatt was called upon to present a devotion and prayer:

At special council meeting last week, Pastor was asked to prepare a devotion. He prepared one which he read to the group in attendance. He wants us to keep focused on the Holy Spirit. The goal is to achieve God's will. He listed 8 items that assist us in discerning God's will. Pastor ended his devotion with a prayer.

Kathy asked if anyone needed copies of this synopsis. Barbara stated that over 30 memorials were brought to the assembly. The concept of sanctuary was not vetted by the national office nor the council of Bishops. It was brought up from the floor as an amendment to add to an approved memorial. The final copy of the memorial was not found for her to reproduce for everyone.

Preston Henne: The Hennes have been members for about 25 years and have been very happy at Christ Lutheran. About 10 years ago, the ELCA took a position on homosexuality. They lived with it. When this new memorial came out with the word "sanctuary" it was perceived by them as negative. They feel it is wrong and also concerned that this adds to their concerns regarding the ELCA's stand on homosexuality and abortion. They brought a motion to disassociate with the ELCA and join another Lutheran organization to the Council on 9/10/19 to be considered for a vote.

David Kuhlmann: Stated that he was rich in family history as a descendent of Lutheran ministers and has deep Lutheran roots. As a resident at Ohio University he was exposed to homosexuality as a part of the training to be a Resident Advisor. His best friend was asked to be his best man at his wedding, but his friend admitted he was gay. David was presented with a decision to make. How was he to deal with this issue as a Christian? Since that time, he has attended many same sex weddings, singing at many. David stated that he has different perspective now and does not believe homosexuality is a sin. He disagrees that sanctuary is a negative term. He feels that the term is an encompassing term.

Mike Morton: Has been members for several years. Mike wants to turn the conversation to the memorial voted on by the synod. In pure form he feels that “sanctuary” is a good word, but it has many other connotations. At this point in time, Mike feels that there is a need to take politics out of the term. He feels that the church needs to be very careful of the term as it is negative now, and he wishes to consider the terminology not as a political term.

** At this point, Kathy passed out the form that is for the ELCA as a questionnaire that goes to the Synod. These questions were given to us by The Rev. Dr. Tony Everett. She encouraged all members present to complete this questionnaire and return it to the church office or to Kathy so that we may pass these on to the Synod office.

Bill Vaglianti: Because the ELCA now says that we are a sanctuary church does this mean we have to be a sanctuary church? **Barbara Klatt** answered that the synod is NOT stating that the congregations have to be a part of harboring illegal immigrants or doing anything with immigrants. As an individual congregation, we are not required to bring anyone in as an illegal immigrant. This is confusing to all, as the wording in the statement is unclear.

Pastor Klatt responded that we are quite autonomous as a congregation. We are not required to protect undocumented or illegal immigrants or any immigrants, if we choose not to.

Doris Stickel: Stated that she does not feel that this an issue that we need to bring up now as it relates to a split in the congregation which has occurred in the past. Doris brought up the facts that the Backpack Buddies and Deep Well serve all children, not knowing what their immigration status might be. The same is said of Family Promise.

Alex Kasten: Alex is proudly an 85 year-old and has been a member for many years. As to the question of leaving or staying with the ELCA, he believes that we need to try to solve the issue within the organization, within our family or drop the issue. Our legal laws address the fact that we are a nation under God. Which comes first- nation or church. Our constitution of the US states that laws of nation come first.

Alex also addressed homosexuality as a part of a biological issue. He stressed that we must plan for the future. If we do not grow, then we will become stagnant. He looks forward to the future and becoming a more accepting congregation.

Barbara Klatt: Addressed the term sanctuary. She read an excerpt from a communication written by Bishop in North Carolina- (get this from Barbara). This is a classic case of the “cart before the horse”. The last thing we needed was a deep wedge. He believes that a few members from the floor picked a fight. *(NOTE: I can get this statement in its entirety from Barbara or it can be found at www.ncsynod.org)*

Gary Reynolds: Gary stated that he was going to read something –a response from an individual who needed to respond to the homosexuality issue voted on by the synod. Gary read this individual’s statement which included many quotes from the scriptures. He read the individual’s statement that stated that all relationships have the same issues, especially as it relates to the issues in the 21st century. He also addressed divorced and remarried couples having other relationships. Gary feels that all relationships need to be considered equally. *(NOTE: I can obtain this response in its entirety from Gary, if needed)*

Joe Fudjack: Joe stated that he and his wife, Barbara have only been here a short time. He was surprised that this issue came up at all. The attitudes in their church in Maryland were not as diverse. He feels that a social statement is just that- a social statement. He does not feel that we need to automatically conform to the edicts of the government. We have to ask what God has asked us to do. Joe feels that when he walks into the church- that is the sanctuary.

Doug Hammes: Grew up in a little town in Oregon. Sexuality, race and abortion were not a part of his upbringing. He stated that it was hard to talk about this. He does not believe in the concept that “three strikes and you are out!”. When Pastor ended the service today, we were asked to serve others and we need to make the decision about how we are asked to serve.

Janet Sullivan: As a mother and wife, Janet is very concerned about the issue, especially the sanctuary term. Janet feels it is God’s job to judge, not ours. She was raised in the oldest Lutheran church in NC with very old roots. The bottom line as she sees it is as Lutherans, our role is to live as Christians. Janet teaches high school where she encounters many young people who do not have faith. As members of this congregation, we are leading this church and will be representing God’s will. Even though that may be uncomfortable, we all as a group, as God’s children, should be welcoming to all.

Alex Kasten: As a post- script: What is the most offensive part of the term sanctuary? He feels that he would like to see the ELCA reconsider using the term.

Emily Breland: Emily asked a question about the next step in process? **Kathy** responded that the next step is: On September 24th, another congregational listening session will be held in Heinrich Hall. All are welcome to attend each session as we welcome the participation of the membership. If the conversation moves forward toward disaffiliation, at the end of the day, the motion is a very serious decision. We have to follow the steps according to what is mandated by our constitution.

Deanna Coyne: Does not believe that we should be giving her funds to the ELCA so that a Lutheran employee can get an abortion. She also pointed out that the ELCA approves a gay minister being married and serving in the pulpit.

Kathy Reynolds: Clarification: you as a member have an option to not support the ELCA. You can earmark that your money does not go to support the ELCA.

Jo Ann Sebulsky: Jo Ann referenced emails that were sent out to the congregation. It appears that some information was out there that others did not get. Christy Marsden stated that these emails were sent out by her to certain members of the congregation whom she believed have the same beliefs as she does. Jo Ann pointed out that emails should be sent to the entire congregation, not just a few. **Kathy** intervened at this time as it is not the venue to challenge each other on a personal basis.

Maria Ternstrom: Maria confessed that she is confused by issue. She and her husband are new to the area as her husband is in the military. She was born and raised in San Francisco where she has seen different sides of issues. She feels ELCA is an umbrella and each congregation like a franchise. It is up to each congregation to decide how they will deal with the issues the Churchwide body brings to us. For example: if you do not wish to have a gay minister, do not seek one out when you are looking for a new minister. Each church has to focus on what you want for your church. She feels that the ELCA is not telling you what you have to do. Maria referred to sanctuary states and cities, and the importance of separation of state and church. She feels it is important to understand that the ELCA is working for us to progress into the future. She sincerely prays for everyone to come together.

Preston Henne: Preston took a few minutes to define the differences between ELCA and LCMC and why he and Connie believe our church should consider these differences, especially after the current Synod position on sanctuary.

Kathy Reynolds wrapped up the meeting with a sincere plea to all in attendance to consider all that was said here today with prayer and with a Christian heart.

Gary Reynolds: Gary left us with the reality that there are a great many activities and projects and challenges facing our church right now. Many of these changes can radically affect our future as a church.

Meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.