

FORUM LETTER

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A fragile and mixed vessel

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“We need to beware a naïve utopianism in our thinking about the church. Even with complete success in the work of renewal, the church will be a fragile and mixed vessel. Jesus warned us that even the kingdom will have wheat and tares which can only be sorted out at the end of the age. Hence we should be prepared to live with all sorts of difficulties, setbacks, strategic retreats and challenges. If any are discouraged, I urge them to read the writings of the fourth-century leaders. Athanasius complained that when the Arians took over his church in Alexandria, folk were frolicking naked in the baptismal fonts. Yet Athanasius stayed the course, organized the faithful in exile, suffered banishment at least five times and eventually won the day for the gospel and the faith.” —William J. Abraham, “Staying the Course: On Unity, Division & Renewal in The United Methodist Church,” in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century*, ed. by Kenneth Tanner & Christopher Hall (InterVarsity, 2002)

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Minneapolis showdown



There was a lot on the agenda of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly (CWA) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Minneapolis August 17-25, but make no mistake about it: the dominant issue—nearly the only issue—was sexuality. Of eleven plenary sessions that week, seven of them dealt extensively with sexuality, and the topic intruded at least briefly into most of the rest. As faithful readers will know, there were two different sexuality matters before the assembly: the approval of a social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (HSGT)*, and a proposal to change current policy which precludes those in homosexual relationships from ordination.

Parliamentary maneuvering

But first the issue arose during the opening plenary in parliamentary guise. ELCA social statements require a 2/3 vote for approval. The proposed change in ministry standards, however, would normally be subject to a simple majority vote. This had caused a good deal of discussion in the months prior to the assembly. The conference of bishops urged a 2/3 vote on a ministry change potentially so divisive. The ELCA church council, however, disagreed, and called for a simple majority. So the first sexuality discussion took place in the context of a debate on the rules.

Bp. Gregory Pile (Allegheny) moved that a 2/3 vote be required to adopt the recommendations on ministry standards, or any motions relating thereto. Bp.

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Pile argued that changing 2,000 years of Christian tradition should require something more than a simple majority, that we need to take the “long view.” Opponents replied that, except for certain clearly defined actions, a simple majority is all that is ever or should be required. In the end, the assembly refused to require a 2/3 majority, 436-584.

How it unfolded

That vote meant that the proponents of change were going to win it all this year, but it was going to take a while to get there. The assembly planners had done a good job allowing for lots of discussion. So first on *HSGT*, and then on the ministry standards, there was a lengthy “quasi committee of the whole” in which there was discussion and debate with no amendments or other motions permitted. Those sessions in each case took place the day before the formal consideration – time for reflection, and a good idea.

Behind this genuine concern for open discussion, however, there was a process to keep things under control. Members wishing to propose amendments had to submit them in writing by a specified deadline. They were then processed by an *ad hoc* committee (made up of both voting members and churchwide staff), which recommended for or against the amendment (mostly against, as it turned out). This reduced the possibility of parliamentary surprise – maybe a good thing, though there was some sense of a small group being given a great deal of influence. When half the voting members are first-timers, an *ad hoc* committee recommendation carries a lot of weight.

Astonishing amendments

In the actual debate on *HSGT*, a couple of really astonishing things happened – things history may judge to be the most telling of all the assembly’s actions. The first was an amendment by Bp. James Mauney (Virginia), who proposed adding a sentence, following *HSGT*’s quotation of Mark 10.6-9, that would read, “Marriage thus provides the possibility for the added blessing of children and the joy and responsibility for raising them in the faith.” The *ad hoc* committee was for it, seeing it as a way to bridge the issues of marriage and family. It seemed a rather innocuous addition.

But when it comes to marriage and sexuality,

nothing is innocuous. Several voting members expressed outrage at the inference that marriages without children are somehow imperfect. One of the oddest comments uttered all week came in a rant about the Virgin Mary being an unmarried mother. Another speaker raged that this was an “attempted end run” around decisions to be made later (though how this might be the case, she did not explain). The fury of the opposition seemed to stun those of a more traditional mind, who took several minutes to get it together enough to defend the amendment. The motion was ultimately defeated 432-563. For some on the traditionalist side, this unwillingness to make a connection between marriage and children was the lowest moment of the assembly.

Abandoning the tradition

The other shocker came from Bp. Kurt Kusserow (SW PA). *HSGT* noted that “some . . . in this church and within the larger Christian community” believe that marriage is an appropriate term to use for committed gay relationships. Bp. Kusserow proposed adding the phrase, “Recognizing that this conclusion differs from the historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions . . .” The *ad hoc* committee agreed that the bishop’s language “aids in clarifying the point.”

Astonishing it was – first, because this passed without debate, and quite overwhelmingly, 677-276. Bp. Kusserow was the only person who even spoke to it. But also because the assembly thus, in a flash of – what can we call it? honesty? arrogance? *hubris*? – simply admitted that what they were advocating stands against the Christian tradition and the confessions.

By a nose

There were other amendments proposed and in some cases adopted, most minor, but it soon became apparent the assembly didn’t want to make significant changes. At last the voting members pushed the buttons on their machines. There was a dramatic pause before Bp. Hanson called for the results to be posted. There was a gasp as the assembly realized that the vote, 676 in favor to 338 against, was precisely 2/3 – 666.667%. One fewer “yes” vote and it would have failed. The assembly applauded.

In the aftermath of this vote, Bp. Hanson’s presiding came under criticism for two reasons.

First, there had been problems with the voting machines throughout the week, with some members unclear as to whether their votes had been recorded. He usually had asked how many had problems, and then judged that it wouldn't affect the outcome. In this case, the closest vote of the week, he didn't ask. He later said he had paused to see if anyone would raise a problem. True enough, though one would think that when he saw the result (he always sees it first, sort of like a judge getting the verdict from the jury before they announce it) he would have made a point of asking if anyone suspected their machine may have malfunctioned.

The other criticism was more serious. The rules ban applause during and after debate. This is handled rather loosely, of course; when something uncontroversial is approved nearly unanimously, there's no concern about applause. The rule is intended to avoid, on closer votes, any sense of winners and losers. But when the assembly applauded the adoption of *HSGT*, the bishop did not try to stop it. This was a serious breach, and the next day he publicly apologized, reminding the body that they must follow the rule in the future.

Implementation

The next act in the drama was consideration of the *HSGT* implementing resolutions. These were "sleepers" — some potentially significant stuff, hidden under the guise of routine procedure. The flash point quickly came to be a resolution "to explore the feasibility of developing liturgical resources for use . . . at the time of divorce." Nobody ever explained just where this came from. *HSGT* devotes only a few lines to the topic, and offers such stunning assertions as "This church will provide supportive pastoral care to those who are divorced." But why call for a ritual?

There was a motion to delete this section. Someone pointed out that *Evangelical Lutheran Worship's Pastoral Care* supplement already contains prayers for use at time of a divorce. Someone else suggested the appropriate liturgical resource might be individual confession and absolution. Never mind; the majority of the assembly, having approved *HSGT*, was not disposed to monkey with the implementing resolutions. The motion failed, 345-629. Look for a divorce ritual coming soon to a *Sundays and Seasons* page near you.

Avoiding marriage

Another voting member, observing that one implementing resolution reaffirmed the 2001 ELCA message "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," moved to include in that reaffirmation the 1996 message "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions." This was a non-controversial document, unless you consider a statement that "Marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman" to be controversial. Some do, of course.

But on this matter, the revisionist forces took a different tack — perhaps because they really didn't want to get into a discussion of marriage, or perhaps because they knew they had won and didn't need to tiptoe anymore. With breathtaking speed, Bp. Hanson called on Rebecca Larson, staff person for the sexuality task force. It would be inappropriate, said she, to reaffirm the 1996 message since in the ELCA universe "social statements" take precedence over and supersede "messages." She neglected to explain why, then, the resolution at hand reaffirming the 2001 message was deemed perfectly appropriate. No one got to ask her about that, though, because the next speaker moved the previous question on all matters before the house, the house sustained it, and all further discussion was cut off. The implementing resolutions were adopted.

The final judgment

With *HSGT* now adopted, the only question remaining was whether the admitted lack of consensus on gay and lesbian clergy meant the ELCA should stick with present policy, or go full speed ahead with change. The assembly agreed to take up Resolution 3 first — that's the one that commits the ELCA to "respect the bound consciences of all."

The conclusion was foregone, but it had to be played out. Former Minnesota Gov. Al Quie (Minneapolis Area) moved to substitute the existing language from *Vision and Expectations* precluding "practicing homosexual persons" from ministry in the ELCA. There was much discussion, but the substitute was defeated, 344-670.

More debate, and then Resolution 3 was adopted (77% in favor). I won't say the assembly moved quickly on the rest, for each entailed lots more debate — or, more properly, lots more opportunity for people to speak their mind. But when the dust had settled, Resolution 1 (allowing congrega-

tions to “recognize, support and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships”) passed with 61%; Resolution 2 (committing the ELCA to finding ways for persons in such relationships to serve as rostered leaders) passed with 55%; and Resolution 4 (spelling out the processes by which that will be done) with 68%. It was, for the proponents of change, the full monty.

Sidebars

Sexuality was the dominant issue in Minneapolis, but of course there are always sidebars—some of them tinged a bit with sexuality as well. I predicted that incumbent Carlos Peña would be re-elected—and he was, but not, as I expected, on an early ballot. It looked like it would go that way at first. Peña’s initial appearance on the dais was winsome, especially when he spoke in Spanish and nearly drove the closed captioner crazy. The first ecclesiastical ballot required 75% for election, and he got about 2/3. Coming in a distant second was Dr. Norma Hirsch, the church council liaison to the sexuality task force. Ninety-four others received one or more votes.

On the second ballot (75% still required) Peña had edged up slightly, while Hirsch’s vote total nearly doubled. Coming up on the outside was Ryan Schwarz, a Washington, DC businessman who is a leader of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform), the organizing force against the sexuality proposals.

The power of words

At this point the top several candidates were invited to address the assembly, responding to three specific questions. Peña fumbled, and badly. His remarks were, to put it gently, a bit fluffy. He looked more like a cheerleader than a leader. Hirsch was sober, speaking as a physician about healing (though there were some who privately thought that choosing a hospice physician as ELCA vice-president after this week might send an interesting message). Schwarz was forthright, advocating for the great commission, “keeping the main thing the main thing,” and acknowledging that the decisions made this week were likely to cause a massive negative reaction among the laity of the ELCA.

Some fine comic relief was provided by Roanoke College ethicist Robert Benne, who was also among the finalists. “I’m here by mistake,” he quipped. “I forgot to remove my name. I’m too old,

and I don’t want the job. But if elected, I and other top leadership would be forced to model the bound conscience because I disagree deeply with the directions of the ELCA.” He acknowledged that winning would probably shorten both his life and that of the presiding bishop, so it would not be a good idea to vote for him. His vote total actually doubled after that, but it was not enough; Peña, Schwarz and Hirsch went on to the next ballot.

But what a change! On this third ballot, Peña lost about 300 votes—almost half his total. It was Peña 371, Schwarz 221, and Hirsch 123 (with the rest of the votes scattered among the other five candidates). I see this as a reaction to the candidates’ presentations. Peña simply did not look like a strong leader, while Schwarz did. Hirsch—though apparently receiving much of her support from those in favor of the sexuality proposal—actually lost votes on this ballot as well.

Different prognoses

This sudden change was startling to almost everyone. The next step was a chance for the three “finalists” to address the assembly again. Peña got a little better, though his argument for his candidacy boiled down to “don’t rock the boat.” Hirsch overplayed her medical analogy by offering a judgment on the ELCA: “condition critical, prognosis good.” Schwarz took frank measure of the divisions in the ELCA, proclaiming them a matter of “how we read and interpret scripture.”

When the smoke had cleared away, Peña barely won on the fourth ballot—he needed 60%, and got just under 61%. It was apparent that most of the votes of the other five candidates had swung back to Peña. My take is that the assembly decided the *status quo* was probably best on this one; Peña has pretty much kept his head down on the sexuality issues, while both Schwarz and Hirsch have been more profiled. So we’ll stick with a cheerleader VP.

Methodist full communion

In normal times, the full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church might have gotten more scrutiny. That was not to be, however. When the matter came before the assembly, there was not one speech in opposition. The only hesitation was a motion that the decision be postponed for two years, since the ELCA has been too preoccupied with other matters to give it the attention it de-

serves. This was quickly voted down.

A long string of synod bishops felt it important to go on record in favor of this agreement—at least 11 or 12 of them, none of them saying anything much different from the one before: “this is good, this will help us, I’m in favor of it.” It seemed overkill—full communion was approved 958 to 51.

Fighting disease

You’ll hear much in the coming months about the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, a proposed joint endeavor of the ELCA, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Lutheran World Relief and the United Nations Foundation. The goal is \$25 million to “disarm malaria’s grip” on the third world. The assembly also approved an HIV/AIDS strategy, with a more modest goal of \$10 million over five years. A worthy cause, though perhaps we could do without the slogan that “the ELCA as a body is HIV/AIDS positive.”

The bigger question about these initiatives—unasked and unaddressed—is the relationship between them and the ELCA World Hunger appeal. Is it really honest to wrap things like the malaria initiative and HIV/AIDS strategy in the blanket of world hunger, which seems to be the plan? The thinking is that hunger is a result of poverty, and malaria and HIV/AIDS are closely connected to poverty—and besides, the hunger appeal gets people to open their wallets, so why mess with it? Especially when there may be rough financial waters ahead.

Spinning wheels

On the closing day, much time was spent on things rather inconsequential. First there was a resolution calling for a social statement on justice for women in church and society, to come to the 2015 CWA—maybe a good idea four decades ago, but whether it is, in the second decade of the 21st century, what the church needs to do is debatable.

Or not. The assembly actually spent quite a long time debating it, if you consider a string of speeches all in favor of it “debate.” The only contrary view was expressed by a laywoman from the TX/LA Gulf Coast synod who identified herself as a Marine Corps veteran and professional percussionist, well aware of the challenges women face, and yet who wondered if this is a good way to spend a million dollars. The assembly thought it was.

There was an even longer debate about setting a goal that at least 10% of the voting members of churchwide assembly, synod assemblies, and various other groups be youth and young adults. There were lots of speeches for and against, some thoughtful, some silly. I didn’t hear anyone ask the obvious question: is this expected to work any better than the ELCA’s longstanding goal that 10% of such bodies be persons of color or language other than English? In the ELCA questions like that are impolite, and the assembly went on after way too much discussion to approve the legislation. And by the end of Saturday afternoon, things had sputtered to a close.

A-list bishops

The morning after I got home, I walked out of my house to see a flock of wild turkeys. I mean no disrespect to either species by saying I immediately thought of bishops. Wild turkeys strut and look very concerned, but if anything threatens, they pull in their tail feathers and run in several directions.

There’s a bit of that among our bishops. They were remarkably quiet about sexuality. A handful were bold enough to speak against what turned out to be the prevailing view, and a couple of others supported the changes. My sense was, however, that the bishops were not nearly as vocal on this issue as they have been in the past.

Not that they weren’t active behind the scenes. A week or so before the assembly over at Forum Online, I posted an e-mail sent by Goodsoil, the pro-gay coalition, to a group described as “A-list bishops,” inviting them to a strategy meeting off site at the beginning of the assembly. (I was asked a bit edgily by the author of the e-mail whether I had hacked into her account, to which the answer is no. Apparently at least one of the A-list bishops needs to be demoted.) Make no mistake, there were bishops highly invested and heavily involved in promoting the sexuality proposals.

At the 2007 CWA, a motion was made asking the bishops to discuss “the accountability of bishops to the adopted policies, practices, and procedures of the ELCA and to formulate a clear statement of such accountability for consideration and adoption” by the 2009 assembly. This was controversial at the time and passed only narrowly; it was seen as an attempt to get the bishops to face up honestly to the

fact that a number of bishops were simply refusing to enforce the policies of the ELCA with regard to ministry standards.

What the bishops sent back to the assembly was a remarkably bland document saying, in essence, “We’ve talked about it, we think the constitution and some other documents already spell this out, and – trust us – we’re accountable; that’s our story and we’re sticking to it.” They did this as a “response” rather than something for the assembly to consider and adopt. It took all of a couple of minutes on the agenda.

Synod bishops continue to be perhaps the most unsatisfactory link in the ELCA’s design. They explain *ad nauseam* that they have no real authority or power in the ELCA structure, and they act pretty much like middle managers who’ve never heard of the bully pulpit. Those with an agenda – there are several – do find ways to promote it, but most keep their heads down, toe the line, and try to hold their synods on an even keel. Some bishops who opposed the sexuality proposals are backing off, making it clear in their synods that, now that “this church” has spoken, they will acquiesce. Meanwhile, pastors from different synods comparing notes about what their bishops are saying in the wake of Minneapolis find that many seem to be using an identical set of talking points. But don’t worry, they’re accountable.

Ecumenism

The United Methodist agreement was the ecumenical event that got the most press (not that it was much), but there were more significant moments. LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick was slated for Saturday – well after the sexuality discussions were over. It was expected that he would comment on the ELCA’s decisions. He did so graciously and pastorally. “I speak now in deep humility and with heavy heart, and no desire to offend,” he said. “Decisions by this assembly will cause additional stress and disharmony within the ELCA and negatively affect relationships between our church bodies. Current division threatens to become a chasm. This grieves my heart.” It is hard to say how much greater the division can become, but there are some in the LCMS who would like to see the current limited cooperation – mostly in relief work – ended. They just may pull that off.

Well, that’s the LCMS. But there was also a

videotaped greeting from Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory, head of the ecumenical office of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He, too, was forthright, with a direct slap at HSGT’s talk of “bound conscience”: “This week the ELCA faces a set of decisions that may have weighty consequences for the unity of your own church and for its relationship with the Catholic Church . . . At stake are the teachings of scripture and tradition [with regard to] sexuality and marriage. Our prayer is that you remain open to the Holy Spirit who *binds our consciences to truth, Biblical truth.*” Quite something when a Roman Catholic bishop can lecture Lutherans about the authority of Scripture.

There were some pre-assembly attempts in the highest circles at Higgins Road to get Bp. Gregory’s greetings pulled, or at least edited. Had that gotten out, of course, it would have been even more embarrassing than giving the archbishop his say, and in the end cooler heads prevailed. But there is little doubt that there will be an almost immediate cooling in formal relationships between the ELCA and the Roman Catholic Church.

Ethnic and global outreach

Another hit the ELCA will likely take will be in its multicultural and global mission efforts. This didn’t get much public play in Minneapolis, though in response to a direct question global mission executive Pr. Rafael Malpica Padilla told the assembly that our partner churches in Tanzania and Hong Kong had both communicated their dismay at the actions on sexuality the ELCA was contemplating. Look for more fallout in the months to come, both globally and among ELCA ethnic ministries.

Periodically throughout the assembly there were brief reports from a variety of interesting and creative ELCA congregations. The very first was from Our Redeemer Oromo Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, a church largely made up of Ethiopian immigrants and refugees. With a membership of some 700, it was described as the largest black congregation in the ELCA. The story of its founding and growth was quite moving.

Left unsaid was that members of the congregation were walking around outside the Minneapolis convention center in a vigil, praying that the churchwide assembly would not approve the sexuality proposals. The story got even more bizarre

when Pastor Francis Stephanos, a former presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church in Mekane Yesus (the Ethiopian Lutheran church) and a former vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation, was escorted from the convention center by security guards. His violation was hanging out in the convention center (in the lobby, not in the assembly place itself) without purchasing a \$50 visitor credential. Officially, no one was permitted to be in the convention hall without a visitor badge for security reasons, though one LCMS pastor told me he had been there much of the day and was never questioned. But then he was white, and he wasn't trying to talk to voting members.

Don't look for this story to be featured in *The Lutheran* or *Seeds for the Parish*.

Politics

There are always politics, of course, though this year the overt politicking seemed more subdued. Goodsoil was there in force, with its own events and strategies; Lutheran CORE was there as well, with events and strategies.

The Goodsoil folks were less "in your face" than in the past. I suspect they smelled victory and knew that their best approach was to be low key and not do anything to push whatever undecided members there were in the wrong direction. That might have been different if they had lost some early votes, but they didn't. They could afford to be quiet and let things progress as they thought they would.

My sense was that Lutheran CORE went into the assembly without much expectation that they could stop the train, and those who were more optimistic pretty much gave it up after the vote Monday night to allow the ministry proposals to pass with a simple majority. They were well-organized, had good leadership, but they just didn't have the troops. As one person commented, "This was lost last year when voting members were selected."

This is hardly the end of Lutheran CORE, however. They had previously scheduled an open meeting in Fishers, IN, for late September, to talk about what comes next. The leadership of Lutheran CORE is for now committed to remaining in the ELCA, but don't expect them to fall into line any time soon. More than one pastor has said to me, "I wasn't planning to go to Fishers, but I am now." What happens there will be crucial in determining

whether those in the ELCA strongly opposed to the CWA actions will, in fact, be willing and able to stay. We'll report on that meeting next time.

Clarity

Another word I heard many times in Minneapolis from the orthodox was "clarity." Usually it went something like this: "Now we have clarity. We know where we stand. It's really quite liberating." On the other hand, clarity can be overrated. And sometimes what seems like clarity is just a deeper shade of ambiguity.

And that's where the ELCA stands at the moment, it seems to me. Lutheran CORE leaders have received hundreds of inquiring e-mails since the assembly. Reports are that phones are ringing off the hook at the offices of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), a quasi-denomination made up mostly of a couple hundred disaffected ELCA congregations. There will be congregations and pastors that will not want to wait and see what might happen in Fishers, but who will want out now, and LCMC has open arms.

There will be other congregations where conversations are already happening about cutting back or even eliminating giving to the ELCA. Often the pastors and other leaders are entertaining this idea – not because they think it is a salutary approach, but because they see it as a way to let off enough steam so that their congregation doesn't explode. This is going to be a small irritation in some synods, a major headache for bishops in others.

Drink ice water

The Sunday after the assembly in my congregation, we had a mostly respectful, though sometimes emotional, forum about it. Afterward a member told me about a friend of his who in difficult situations would often reel off a Finnish phrase. It meant roughly, "Walk slowly and drink ice water." That seems to me to be pretty good advice for the moment. I am not sanguine about the future of the ELCA. And while the ELCA is where I am planted and called, the ELCA is a denomination. It is not, finally, the church. What God will do over the next months will gradually unfold, and we will see.

In the meantime, I'm stocking up on ice water.

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Omnium gatherum



You're kidding! • One of our Forum Online readers thought we needed a chuckle, so she sent this story. Seems her son left the Lutherans some years ago to marry a Church of the Nazarene girl, and became a Nazarene pastor. With strong familial Lutheran connections, he thought he should explain some of our current controversies to his 7-year-old. So he told Ella there were some churches where the pastor might be a man whose partner was a man, or a woman whose partner was a woman. To which young Ella replied, "You're kidding me! Women pastors?!?"

Pfatteicher review • Last time I mentioned Phillip Pfatteicher's review in *Studia Liturgica* of the Daily Office in *ELW* and *LSB*. Seems there was a slightly different (not quite so scholarly) version of the same article in *CrossAccent: the Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians*. But if you don't have access to either, the latter version was posted at *Lutheran Forum*. Go to www.lutheranforum.org, click "Extras" and scroll down.

My mistake • Last month I lamented the apparent decision by the publishers of *Logia* to start sending that Lutheran theological journal out in pdf format rather than print. Senior editor Michael Albrecht tells me I made a mistake; that pdf deal is only for those who receive complimentary copies, not for paid subscribers. I was confused because I used to be a paid subscriber, but then they offered me a

complimentary copy as *FL* editor, and I said "Sure." So my lament about the rapid demise of print media needs to find another example. I apologize for the error, but it does give me a second chance to plug *Logia*, which is a thoughtful journal, well worth perusing (www.logia.org).

Not my mistake • Last time I also wrote about comments made by Oregon synod Bp. David Brauer-Rieke ("Telling it like it is," Sept. 2009 *FL*). Of course bishops never read *Forum Letter*, but someone told him about this article. He thought it worth replying, in his weekly synodical e-mail, that what I reported was wrong. "I want to assure you all," he wrote, "that I did not say anything of this sort. The 'bound conscience' commitment of this church, and me personally, is absolutely not a 'temporary expedient.' Nor are the needs and concerns of congregations in the call process ever ignored. . . . I am saddened that whatever the reporter heard me saying was construed my words in this fashion [*sic*]. It is not an accurate report." I would clarify that the phrase "temporary expedient" was my description of what he said, and not a direct quotation (nor was it presented that way in the article). In reviewing my notes, I find that his exact phrase regarding the bound conscience was that this would be honored "for now," which sure sounds like "something of that sort" to me. As to the substance of what he said, I stand by the story as written.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

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