



LUTHERAN LESBIAN & GAY MINISTRIES

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GAY LUTHERANS CELEBRATE 15th ANNIVERSARY – SF MAYOR TO RECEIVE AWARD

Celebration Takes Place as the Lutheran Church Concludes 4-Year Study of Homosexuality

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom will be the featured speaker at Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries' 15th anniversary celebration. The mayor will speak at a gala banquet at the Cathedral Hill Hotel on Saturday, January 15, 2005, at 7 p.m. Mayor Newsom will receive the Voice of Distinction Award for his leadership in seeking to legalize same-sex marriage in San Francisco.

The occasion celebrates the 15th anniversary of the ordinations of the first openly gay and lesbian Lutheran pastors in the United States on January 20, 1990, and the founding of Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, an advocacy organization for full participation for LGBT people in the Lutheran Church.

The 1990 ordinations were controversial because the candidates had not been approved for ordination by the parent church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The three candidates were graduates of Lutheran seminaries and had qualified for call and ordination in all respects, except that they did not agree to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships, as required by the ELCA's policy. After a church trial, the calling congregations, St. Francis and First United Lutheran Churches of San Francisco, were subsequently expelled from the ELCA. The expulsions brought national attention to ministries with gay and lesbian people, and sparked a lively debate among Lutherans.

Fifteen years later, both churches are alive and well, the three ordained people are still involved in ministry, and the struggle by LGBT people for full participation in the life of the church and society continues.

The gala celebration comes two days after the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's taskforce on sexuality recommended no change in the current policy that requires openly gay and lesbian pastors to remain celibate. "We are dismayed and deeply saddened by the taskforce's report" said Greg Egertson, Co-Chair of Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries. "After four years of study, we expected more leadership from our church, and more progress toward justice. Instead, the recommendations continue to encourage the discrimination of gay and lesbian pastors in our church."

"Even so, this is a time of celebration for us" Egertson said. "Our numbers are growing, our ministries are thriving and the gifts of gay and lesbian Lutheran pastors are being recognized, affirmed and shared. If you want to see the future face of inclusive Lutheran ministry, this is it!"

The anniversary event will be preceded by a 3:30 PM worship service at St. Francis Lutheran Church honoring the ministries of nearly 40 LGBT pastors and seminarians who have been rostered with the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, and the history of the Lutheran ministries to lesbian and gay people which began 15 years ago.

Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries (LLGM) was founded in 1989 in response to the ELCA's refusal to allow openly gay and lesbian pastors to serve in the church. The 1990 ordinations of seminary graduates Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart in San Francisco, drew national media attention and began a nationwide movement to provide legal, pastoral and financial support to gay and lesbian pastors who were threatened with discipline, dismissed from their positions or removed from the ELCA clergy roster.

Over the years, LLGM has provided support to dozens of clergy who find themselves caught in a bind between being honest about their sexual orientation and losing their jobs. LLGM also provides financial and legal assistance to those congregations who support their pastor and risk loss of members and discipline from ELCA bishops.

For more information on Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries see their web site:
www.llgm.org

The Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) was founded in 1993 as a project of Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries and other advocacy groups to certify the credentials of openly identified sexual minority pastors and seminarians who no longer wish to keep their sexual orientation a secret from their congregations and ELCA church officials.

Nationally, there are nearly 40 pastors and seminarians on the ECP roster and the list is growing. Pastors and seminarians who apply to the ECP for certification must meet the same rigorous standards as those who apply for certification from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), except gay and lesbian pastors are not expected to remain celibate as the ELCA requires. The committees that certify ECP candidates are made up of ELCA seminary professors, retired bishops, pastors and lay leaders from various professions. The ECP is not formally affiliated with the ELCA.

For more information on the ECP see their web site:
www.extraordinarycandidacyproject.org