



LUTHERAN LESBIAN & GAY MINISTRIES

Press Statement

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Good afternoon. My name is Greg Egertson, and I am Co-Chair of Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries.

On behalf of the board of directors, it is my privilege and utter delight to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the ordinations of the first openly gay and lesbian pastors in the Lutheran Church: the Rev. Jeff Johnson, the Rev. Ruth Frost and the Rev. Phyllis Zillhart. We honor them today, as we also honor the members of two San Francisco congregations, First United Lutheran Church and St. Francis Lutheran Church, who had the prophetic wisdom and courage to call these pastors and offer their ministries to us, to the community, and even to the world.

These congregations provided the cradle into which Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries was born, and these pastors have been the stars we have followed for fifteen years, leading us and the whole church into a new day! And so, to all of you we say: thank you for your vision, thank you for your courage, thank you for your sacrifice, and thank you for the light that you have shown to guide us along our way!

Fifteen years ago this weekend, over a thousand people gathered together at St. Paulus Lutheran Church in San Francisco to launch the first public Lutheran ministry for, with and by openly gay and lesbian people. Those of us who were there still remember the power of that event and the hope it offered to so many who had been rejected by their church. On that day, there was a real sense that the Spirit was among us, that the power of God was moving in our community and in our church, calling us to do a new thing, filling us with anticipation and promise.

Fifteen years later, that spirit is still moving among us. And we see that promise fulfilled over and over again in the ministries of the nearly 40 Lutheran pastors and seminarians who have been rostered with the Extraordinary Candidacy Project. This afternoon, we gather in worship once again, to celebrate these ministries and affirm the calls of those who have risked so much in order to serve their church.

At the same time, it saddens us that the vocations and remarkable gifts of these pastors continue to go unrecognized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Just this week, after four years of "study," the ELCA's taskforce on sexuality reaffirmed the policies that discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. And so, once again, we say to our church: "Be not afraid." Rescind the policies that continue to inflict harm, destroy faith, discount loving relationships and drive people away from God. We admonish you, our ELCA brothers and sisters: reform cannot come too soon.

Since Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries was formed in 1990, we have sponsored and supported five more extraordinary ordinations. We have endorsed and encouraged the installation of nearly 20 sexual minority pastors. We have awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in mission support grants, and we have responded with emergency assistance to pastors and congregations who have been threatened with the most serious forms of church discipline. We have dedicated our lives to this justice work and we will not stop until every sexual minority person is able to hear the message that God has written on our hearts: Claim your wholeness. You are a beloved child of God, deserving of love, honor, respect, and full participation in the life and leadership of your church.

This is the message that we were given fifteen years ago. This is the message that we celebrate and proclaim so loudly today! Thank you.