

Frequently Asked Questions:

“What if I or the congregation that I belong to do not agree with the actions taken by the churchwide assembly, is there anything we can do?”

Yes you do have options. First, read the documents and talk about them. Make sure you know what they say so that you are basing your decisions on the language of the documents and not on what you have been told by others.

Once you have studied the documents and come to the conclusion that you disagree with the decisions that were made you can:

- decide that the documents give your congregations the flexibility that you desire in deciding whom you will call to leadership positions within your congregation, what will be practiced in your congregation and what will be taught. The documents support the local congregation’s ability to make its own decisions for ministry and mission.
- decide to make a Statement of Declaration: This statement allows the congregation to make public statement about what it believes in relation to matters of sexuality.
- decide to take the Statement of Declaration form letter provided by the synod and do more in-depth study of your own congregation, laying out in much more detail what it is that your congregation – as followers of Christ believe. This could be an excellent exercise for any congregation, forcing us to define who we are in this day and how we will work to define God’s mission in our part of the world and how we think we are called to be part of that mission.
- decide to make changes to the by-laws of your congregational constitution. This is allowable, but may not be the best option. When putting language in governing documents you need to be succinct. It would be harder to describe exactly what you want in a by-law as compared to writing a Statement of Declaration.
- decide to start the process to leave the ELCA. Your synod staff will walk with you through this process. This process is laid out in the constitution of the church. Let me be honest, I pray that we can avoid this because this denomination will be diminished if the voices of those who dissent leave.

“There are those in my congregation who want to celebrate this change, how do we do this without offending others?”

I don’t have a good answer for this, it is a delicate issue. I do recognize that there are people in our communities who see these changes as grounded in Christ’s grace. There are those who have felt marginalized and now feel that the church they love, fully recognizes them.

“Will a congregation be forced to accept as its leader a person in a publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same gender relationship?”

At the heart of this question is an issue of trust. As I answer no, will congregations trust that what is said will be the actions of the future? Even if synod staff prove to be untrustworthy, will you trust the members of your congregation, since it is the local congregation that makes the decisions on whom they will call?

“When seeking a pastor, will we know if they are in a publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same gender relationship?”

My sense is yes you will. We will know for sure in the coming weeks and months. Right now churchwide staff are involved in writing the policies to carry out the actions of the churchwide assembly. My expectation is that there will be great transparency in these policies. Why? First because it is my belief that those in publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same gender relationships are not interested in hiding their relationship. Secondly, because in some way those who are in such relationships will need to define how it is “publicly accountable”. Third, for the sake of heterosexual single candidates.