

*via E-Mail*

To: John Ballew, Atlanta, GA

Date: August 16, 2005

From: Dan Hooper

I have to echo and endorse what you have said, John. The positive results of Orlando were few. I find myself thinking, "at least it wasn't worse." But is that the best the best Lutherans in America could come up with? At least they didn't forbid us to bless our own relationships. At least they official want the unity of the church to go on. At least Bishop Hanson hopes that GLBT people won't feel unwelcome.

Frankly, I cannot tell from my own feelings if I should be angry or deeply saddened. Neither emotion is particularly productive, and the only which is productive is to be resolutely faithful to our calling—to keep on ministering in Jesus' name to the excluded ones, the "outcasts of Israel" and the others whom God is gathering (Isaiah 56).

It means our ministries are without official support and blessing, but should we expect any better that what happened to Jesus? "If they do this when the wood is green, what will they do when it is dry?" The fire will burn only hotter.

So that probably means that when the next San Bernardino or Hollywood or Minneapolis action of ecclesiastical disobedience occurs, the fire will burn hotter. The fire of the Spirit will inflame us all the more with zeal for our mission in the name of Jesus. But it could also mean that our opponents will burn hotter as well. Or as John has said, This is "living together faithfully?"

We will watch to see if those ultra-conservatives —unhappy that the ELCA wouldn't strongly affirm V&E, wouldn't forbid the blessing of our relationships— will still take their benevolence marbles and go home. I've been feeling for weeks that the ELCA was acting out one of those terrible murder-suicide tragedies. You know, where the guy kills his wife and kids and then turns the gun on himself. I always thought, well if he's that filled with rage, why didn't he do the suicide first before the murder? If the conservatives are going to try to kill the larger church (both its openness to all people and especially to those who are enduring rejection and suffering, AND its capacity to fund its programs) only to exit our mist, why couldn't they just have exited beforehand?

But Jesus is Lord, and I am not. I am not the Holy Spirit. I do not have answers. Yet I am left troubled by the comment of one conservative speaker during the debate on Friday – just around the time the Assembly denied Anita Hill the privilege to speak (so they went on record as saying, no we don't want to hear from someone who is directly affected by our decisions) – who said that they (the Childs Commission?) had failed to make the case in favor of changing the rules.

I am troubled because I think he is somewhat right. We pursued the "justice" angle, which is true enough, but we failed to state the theological and biblical truth of our case forcefully enough that people who THINK they are being faithful to the Bible would have to question their homophobic hermeneutics. We do not have the means to communicate fully enough with the whole church – to send whole books and DVD's to every delegate, for example – to counter the wishy-washy studies done by the Childs-Payne "study." We did not publish a forceful analysis of the sins of V&E – not only what's ineffective and unjust about it, but about how it goes against Scripture and the Confessions even to have such a statement.