



A CALL FOR REPENTANCE

ASSEMBLY '88, a gathering of Lutherans Concerned/North America held in Toronto July 21-24 of this year, was an expression of Lutheran lesbians' and gay men's communal life with all of its joys, pains, and hopes. As we pondered there the unifying power of our baptisms, we were reminded of our full membership in the Lutheran Church. As your sisters and brothers in Christ, there, we share our present pain and anger with the people and leaders of the Lutheran churches of North America.

We do this in the hope

- that you will come to know better who we are,
- that you will likewise express your feelings and hopes,
- that out of dialogue and prayer together we may create a truly inclusive, non-marginalized Lutheran Church, eager to serve God and one another, and to celebrate together God's gift of grace for us all.

Hear now our pain and anger.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA:

With deep grief and sadness we feel compelled to address you now. We had hoped this would not be necessary, but the limits of our patience, long strained, have been exceeded. Furthermore, we are convinced that silent endurance of the pain of rejection is no virtue. If we love you, we must tell you the truth.

For some time we have cherished the hope and belief that as members of the Church by virtue of our baptisms, we too, like so many of you, would find support, care, and compassion in the institutional expressions of the Church. For more than a decade we have patiently laid before you the stories of our lives, our faith, and our witness, believing that the pain and suffering we and our families have endured would be sufficient to move you to action. While we have always been confident of God's love and acceptance, all too infrequently have we felt or seen that love and acceptance enfolded in our Church.

From the founding of Lutherans Concerned in 1974 we have committed ourselves to work with you in a ministry of reconciliation and healing. We are grateful for the signs of grace that keep our hope alive: "Reconciled in Christ" congregations welcoming our brothers and sisters into full fellowship; occasional open discussion of issues related to our community by various groups within the church; pastors and laypersons who sacrifice their time and energy by ministering to persons with AIDS (PWA's) and their families; those bishops and pastors who have been willing to minister to us; and those individual saints who have accepted and loved us in the name of

Christ. Yet, after fourteen years, many of us feel increasing frustration, growing anger, and diminishing hope. The dream of participating fully and openly in the life of the Church remains a dream, and only a dream, for most of us.

It is apparent that the commitment we made so long ago was neither met nor taken seriously by much of the church. To many of you the steps that have been taken may appear to be significant progress, but those of us who bear the pain of the Church's neglect are not satisfied. Our pain remains unabated, our thirst for justice unquenched.

We bear witness that:

- The churches have failed to promote responsible exegesis of biblical texts, allowing Scripture to be used as a weapon against us.
- The churches have been unfaithful to our confessional heritage by adding a requirement of celibacy for ordination which is clearly repudiated by the Augsburg Confession (Article XXIII).
- The churches have denied us full participation in congregational life.
- The churches have denied us access, in some instances, to the sacraments.
- The churches have permitted malicious, false and antiquated images of lesbian and gay persons by allowing us to be maligned, attacked, and denigrated from the pulpit.
- The churches have refused to censure or even refute those who claim AIDS to be the judgment of God.
- The churches have responded to us primarily out of institutional self-interest rather than love and concern.
- The churches have fostered confusion by claiming a distinction between affectional orientation and action, thereby further distorting people's understanding of our lives.
- The churches have denied that gay men and lesbians can have committed, loving relationships, and have instead fostered promiscuity by not nurturing our existing partnerships.
- The churches have dismissed our community's input as prejudiced, and presumed to speak to our issues out of their own bias rather than knowledge.
- The churches have denied our gifts and ministries.
- The churches have fostered an exclusive and narrow image of the family and failed to recognize the rich diversity of family systems.
- The churches have neglected and abandoned young women and men who are struggling to understand the meaning of their affectional and sexual orientation.
- The churches have joined the conspiracy of silence that surrounds not only our concerns but our very existence.
- The churches have ignored their own resolutions and statements calling for civil rights for gay and lesbian persons, and have shown disinterest in such issues through a witness of silence.
- The churches have actively censored news about our lives and our community in church periodicals.

- The churches have pretended to be inclusive, yet ignored entire groups of marginalized persons: our families, our partners, our children, PWA's, lesbian and gay seniors, persons of color, and the economically or socially disadvantaged.
- The churches have abandoned us in the face of growing homophobia, violence, and oppression.

As baptized members of the body of Christ, we seek healing and wholeness for ourselves and for the entire Lutheran community. Our yearnings for reconciliation and full acceptance are now directed toward an invitation to you to journey with us to justice.

The First Sunday in Advent, November 27, 1988

We value your response to this open letter. Write to Lutherans Concerned, Post Office Box 10461, Fort Dearborn Station, Chicago, Illinois 60610.