

So, what were the results of the surveys?

Let me start by saying that we did get a significant response. However, we are aware that we did not get a response from over half of the active congregation. Your concerns and opinions do matter. Those who have responded asked questions, offered counsel, and stated your convictions clearly. What was of most concern from the surveys returned centered around four key items.

First, what is the role of the Bible? How do we read and interpret what the Bible says? In debates throughout the ELCA Bible passages were cited to both support and oppose the changes regarding ministry policies and the social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust".

Second, what shall we teach? There were many concerns about how scripture is going to be taught especially to the children. Let me reply by saying that we are all baptized children of God. *God's love for us is unconditional.* We are also at the same time both sinners and saints. That has not changed. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God and all of us have been justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (See Romans 3:21-26). Keep in mind also that the Social Statement speaks about much more than homosexuality. This church (ELCA) through the adopted social statement strongly condemns such things as rape, child trafficking, pornography, sexual abuse, etc.

A third concern from the surveys was the attitude of the congregation. Will we welcome all people to worship with us and will our actions reflect such a welcome? Emotions ran high during the open forum in August. Some time has passed. The opportunity has been made to give members a way to express opinions through the survey.

Yes, there will be future discussions. As your Pastor it is my sincere hope as well as the hope of our council, that these conversations be held with care. This is not a faceless issue. We can disagree, we can express our disagreements. We ask that in expressing our disagreements we do so with calm respect.

The last key concern was how do we exercise our voice? The process for doing this is through participating in the study materials that are prepared as part of the feedback for developing social statements. That is where members of congregations can offer their input directly.

When issues come before the church they are brought by congregations to synod assemblies. Synod assemblies can send memorials asking the ELCA to take actions or refrain from taking actions on a variety of topics. Synod assemblies is where our voice is most directly heard and that is why it is important that each year we have the maximum number of voting members permitted, which for a congregation of our size is four lay voting members plus the pastor.

As is expressed in this newsletter there are options and information we are still pursuing. There will be conversation with our Bishop and Synod staff. Those conversations will help inform the council about specific recommendations we may bring to the congregation in the near future.