

# **Questions for Bishop Burk**

## **Theology and Biblical Interpretation**

### **Monday, June 21, 2010**

**(Bishop Burk's answers to our questions in bold black. Responses to the Bishop's remarks are italicized)**

**The Bishop's initial comments centered around what the nature of our study entailed. If it is done with the intention of how to renew the relationship with the ELCA then he felt it would be helpful. If it leads to a separation – hopes we enter into that with the same sort of approach with the division of a relationship.**

- 1) Can you take us through a basic understanding of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation and how it differs from a more fundamental or literalistic interpretation of Scripture...

**The Bishop explained that Form Criticism and the Historical-Critical method have provided two additional tools for Biblical interpretation. Among other things, these approaches seek to get at the context and meaning of scripture both when it was written and during earlier periods in the history of God's people. The goal of these and other tools is to help us understand God's Word and how it speaks to us today. The question remains who gets to be the authority in interpretation – the pastor, the council, the bishop? Among Lutherans, Biblical study has always been done best in community. When the community explores the Word, sometimes long-held understandings are renewed. Other times, they yield to a new understanding, which is not simply a recent or rare occurrence.**

*Response to Bishop's Comments: One former ELCA bishop writes that the difference between how the ELCA's recently developed understanding of Scripture versus the historical-critical method is that we have moved from the historical-critical method to simply the critical method. His view is that the ELCA seminaries and theologians have lost the sense of the Bible as divine revelation. The most recent ELCA view employs "communal discernment" as the norm for interpretation of Scripture over against the long-held method of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.*

- 2) Our affinity diagram had consistent questions regarding how we view:

- Whether stories in the Bible are true, including if Jesus said what the Bible says he said

**Official stance of the ELCA is that the stories in the Bible are true. Understanding truth is complicated when there appear to be contradictions within scripture. Though there appear to be distinct creation stories, the deepest truth is that God is the creator, tending and loving creation.**

- What Bible passages do we hold as paramount in defining who we are as the people of God?

**Individuals often claim favorite or "guiding" passages (for instance the visible presence of John 3:16 a sporting events). Luther and the reformers already talked about a canon within a canon – that is, privileging some of scripture over other portions without disavowing any of it. Luther may have privileged a different "canon" from Melancthon. Some groups of Lutherans may focus on different aspects than other Lutherans. It's not an issue of debate but dialog and discussion.**

- How do we interpret the Bible (including Bible interprets Bible issues) today?

**This is among the most fundamental questions facing the ELCA today. Currently there is an ongoing, sometimes tense, dialog within ELCA. Many Lutherans have historically held that the gospels and Pauline literature are essential to interpreting other parts of Scripture. The**

**Southeastern Iowa Synod has recently focused on Luke 4:16-21 as a lens through which to view Christ's mission and our call to follow. The ELCA is currently emphasizing a "Book of Faith" initiative, intent on helping more people be fluent in the first language of the faith...that is, the Bible.**

- Follow up question on how this process influenced the Human Sexuality study

**In the ELCA – there is an established process for making decisions that impact this whole church (whether or not we agree). While there are particular voting members at a churchwide assembly, that group of individuals (60% lay, 40% clergy) came together as a result of decision that begin much more locally. At our best, we all have the opportunity to participate in and make sense of the decision making, even and especially on controversial matters. On these decisions the controversy hasn't gone away. We all have a vested interest in the ongoing conversations. Framework has to do with trust. Decisions made, where we end up is based on a method by which all of us have a chance. We're still wrestling and where we land is part of the whole community in dialog.**

- Another follow up question (David Brauhn): is the conclusion that the Old and New Testament is not the final word (I think as this relates to CWA actions)?

**CWA determined an opening for where there are places where people may serve where the community has a conscience bound understanding of the Bible as providing for such an opening. Human sexuality statement expresses that there are different biblically-informed perspectives held on this issue.**

*Response: There are some who struggle with the newly defined concept of bound conscience since the original understanding of this stems from Luther's stance during the Reformation where he proclaimed his conscience "bound to the Word of God" against some of the actions of the Roman Catholic Church which he deemed to be outside of Biblical orthodoxy. The irony is that the ELCA is now using this phrase to support those who view Scripture in a way contrary to 2,000 years of Christian history.*

- 3) The Lutheran magazine, the ELCA Study Bible, and the ELCA website all have references to Universalism (references are attached/available). Each of these quote an ELCA seminary professor or Bishop.

**Lutheran Magazine is independent.**

**Lutheran Study Bible: Notion behind this – is a Bible but that would have footnotes at the bottom that contributed by Lutheran theologians. At least one of those footnotes came from one of our seminary professors – but it was a footnote that sought to make a point that is included in a much broader paper. It has been interpreted to expresses a tilt toward universalism. The publisher, Augsburg Fortress has publicly apologized for not correcting this impression when editing, has made revised notes available, those revisions are reflected in subsequent printings of the study Bible.**

**Website – this area of the website is not dogmatic and is not trying to describe orthodoxy. The Bishop stated that he himself is not a Universalist, but can see places in the Bible that push people to contemplate. He cited the text in John's gospel when Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." There is no doubt about the universal nature of Christ's death. He died for the whole world. The suggestion of universalism to some is that there are no consequences to decisions we make in life. If you look hard enough for signs that some people within the ELCA or other denominations adhere to a Universalist view, you will find it.**

*Response: While the Bishop discounted all of the citations in the Lutheran Magazine, the Lutheran Study Bible, and the ELCA website, the fact remains that the ELCA leaders have made the statements that appeared in the Lutheran Magazine and continue to maintain what is found on the ELCA website despite protests.*

- In what ways is each of these entities (or other published materials that are endorsed by the ELCA) monitored for theological soundness/orthodoxy? Is there a system for this?

**The Bishop encourages us to call the ELCA ourselves and follow through on this question regarding the website. All of us are a part of the community and part of the answer is us taking responsibility for holding those who manage the website accountable for its content.**

*Response: It appears that the ELCA either fails to have an oversight management system to deal with unorthodox issues or is comfortable with the tension of Universalism in the midst of the orthodox understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.*

- If these sorts of references appear in ELCA endorsed publications and are not removed, is it a fair assumption that the ELCA is in agreement with, or at minimum, is tolerant of these seemingly unorthodox theological suppositions?
- 4) There have been many references to ELCA seminary professors espousing unorthodox Christian positions including (references attached/available):
- Jesus was not born of a virgin
  - That Jesus' resurrection was not physical
  - That Jesus' death was not for the purpose of salvation
  - That the Old Testament prophecies do not refer to Jesus
  - That Jesus was not divine.

These questions result:

- How does this church define orthodoxy and what it teaches in relationship to orthodox Christian beliefs?
- What is the ELCA's relationship with our seminaries? What control, if any, does ELCA leadership have over what is taught in the classrooms?
- If there are no parameters on the relationship, how does the ELCA maintain its allegiance to Lutheran confessions in what it is teaching its future pastors?

**The Bishop stated categorically that Jesus was born of a virgin, that his resurrection was physical, that his death is all about salvation, that Christians have always held that the Old Testament prophecies have pointed toward Jesus and that Jesus is unambiguously both divine and fully human. He went on to say that he didn't know any seminary professors who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. One professor in question who he had for systematic theology in seminary believes in the resurrection but often challenges students in thought process (provocative but orthodox). He compares this to Jesus sitting at dinner with the Pharisees – how would that be interpreted by others? A significant safeguard in place is candidacy process that provides for the synod candidacy committee to question candidates for ministry and offer final approval.**

*Response: The fact remains that some ELCA seminary professors are actively teaching that Jesus was not born of a virgin, his resurrection was not physical and that his death was not for the purpose of salvation. References of teachings available.*

- 5) The ELCA is a full communion partner with the United Church of Christ. This means that we are able to share pastors and ministries as well as altar and communion fellowship with the UCC. The UCC has 20

churches which are also affiliated with the Unitarian Universalists Association (UUA) who invite their worshippers to “search for truth on many paths” (they include Muslim, Atheism, Buddhism, etc in that definition).

- What is the basis for full communion partnership with other churches?

**The Full Communion relationship we have with UCC is based on the Formula of Agreement with UCC, PCUSA, and Reformed Church in America. The basic principle is visible sign of unity with table fellowship and interchangeability of ministries for the sake of mission. Mainly this allows congregations in smaller communities to partner where their ministries might otherwise perish. In regards to the 20 UUA churches which are allied with UCC churches there is no transitivity. In other words, the ELCA has no connection to the UUA because some congregations within the UCC may have relationships. Lutheran pastors could not serve those UCC churches.**

*Response: Some believe that while the ELCA claims there is no transitivity between UCC/UUA churches and the ELCA, there is still a lack of clear understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone within the UCC. The UUA does not believe in the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, or that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This, in itself, would violate Article VII of the Augsburg Confession which bases church unity on the basic understanding of the gospel.*

- What happens if that church has affiliations with churches that have not only unorthodox beliefs, but also beliefs contrary to our understanding of faith?
- 6) An ELCA Church in California (Ebenezer/herchurch Lutheran) conducts a goddess rosary each week ([www.herchurch.org](http://www.herchurch.org)). Prayers are offered to the Divine Goddess. Images of female deities (references available/attached) are present. The new ELCA hymnal has offered alternatives to the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and removed many references to God in any male pronouns.
- What, if any, parameters are placed on churches in worship language? What is the process by determining whether a church may be practicing unorthodoxy?

**Bishop Burk told us that he would be checking into the church mentioned in question #6 and had already left a message for the Bishop to ask what is happening there. He stated that if the report is correct it is outside the range of acceptable practices.**

**Update from Bishop Burk (August 13): After visiting with the bishop and with another synod staff member who knows the congregation and the pastor well, there is an acknowledgement that this congregation "pushes around the edges" on matters that make some of us uncomfortable. Things like what they refer to this "rosary" are seen by many to be outside the bounds, but don't rise to level of anything in the disciplinary arena. Speaking explicitly about the pastor and regular worship experience there, when folks have "dropped in unannounced" they have experienced preaching that is decidedly within Lutheran orthodoxy and worship that is familiar and done with integrity. It was said that this small congregation is serving the local community very well, especially when it comes to reaching out to the local community.**

- How would you answer the criticism that the ELCA is changing the doctrine of the Trinity in part based on changing the Trinitarian language?

**Bishop spoke at length regarding the processes in the new cranberry hymnal (ELW) of giving opportunity where it seemed appropriate to remove male pronouns. There are places within the psalms, for instance, where the language in some places allows for a certain arrangement of language to eliminate use of a pronoun altogether or change third person to second person. He stressed that the version of the psalms is not intended to be a direct translation of Scripture. Like**

**the version in LBW and many hymn books, it is a version intended for singing. The Bible has rich imagery for God, not limited to masculine. God is spirit, the Bible says. The Trinitarian formula is upheld throughout the hymnal with options that use Biblical foundations for options in invoking the name of the triune God. The ELCA is clear (and the worship book reinforces) that baptisms must be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

*Response: We continue to wait on a response to the Bishop's call to the Pacific Synod Bishop regarding the unusual worship practices at Ebenezer/herchurch Lutheran. While the Bishop has indicated in another communication that we shouldn't judge any organization based on its fringe members, in recent weeks three ELCA bishops participated in an ordination for six gay, lesbian, or transgender persons that contained unusual worship practices. The service included elements reflecting the practice of some of the congregations of the new ELCA pastors. One element included was the use of several versions of "the Lord's Prayer." Worshipers were invited to pray what was called "the Prayer of Jesus" "in the language most familiar to you." Options included three prayers bearing resemblance to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Following are three "Prayers of Jesus" from the service. The first is from the "goddess rosary" used by University Lutheran Chapel of Berkeley, Calif., and Ebenezer Lutheran Church of San Francisco — [www.herchurch.org](http://www.herchurch.org).*

*Our Mother who is within us we celebrate your many names. Your wisdom come, your will be done, unfolding from the depths within us. Each day you give us all that we need. You remind us of our limits and we let go. You support us in our power and we act in courage. For you are the dwelling place within us, the empowerment around us, and the celebration among us, now and forever. Amen.*

*God, lover of us all, most holy one, help us to respond to you to create what you want for us here on earth. Give us today enough for our needs; forgive our weak and deliberate offenses, just as we must forgive others when they hurt us. Help us to resist evil and to do what is good; For we are yours, endowed with your power to make our world whole. Amen.*

*Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven. The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the people of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth! With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.*

*The difficulty here is that this no longer seems to be a fringe element within the ELCA participating in unusual practices.*

- 7) ELCA missionaries have been told to "dialogue" with people of other religions and not to invite them to faith in Christ. This seems to be an apparent contradiction with Matthew 28:16-20 ("Go and make disciples of all nations") and Romans 10:9-17 ("And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?")

- Can you comment on your understanding of this ELCA practice?

**Bishop Burk was not aware of this practice, but would be speaking with missionaries from our synod and supported by St. Mark's, Dirk and Sarah Stadlander, who would be returning soon from Senegal. He spoke of the fundamental and respectful shift around a different question related to global mission – away from missionaries that simply go and "minister to" others. The**

**ELCA's model of "accompaniment" emphasizes "ministry with" others that is as intent on learning as it is on teaching...and always toward the goal of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.**

**Update from Bishop Burk (Aug 13): I have talked with our Global Mission colleagues at the Lutheran Center who assure me that missionaries of this church are witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ are not encouraged to be shy about sharing that good news. Every context shapes the way that the Gospel is proclaimed, and while the context - particularly where other faiths are present, even dominant - may require a sensitivity, it is not a policy to yield on the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world.**

- What would prevent us from inviting people to faith in Christ?

**Bishop responded nothing prevents us – it is our calling.**

*We have not received any personal confirmation from missionaries regarding the ELCA practice. While the Bishop's contact with the Lutheran Center is an attempt to get at the issue, it still is the opinion of those whom are actually being called to accountability.*

#### 8) About Called to Common Mission

- Called to Common Mission has been heavily criticized within the ELCA for the past ten years. It is an agreement with the Episcopal Church that lead to the formation of the Word Alone Network and other factions within the ELCA. Some within the ELCA have argued that requiring the historic episcopate contradicts the traditional Lutheran doctrine that the church exists wherever the Word is preached and Sacraments are practiced. Another objection is that adopting the Episcopalian priesthood and hierarchical structure was contrary to the Lutheran concept of the "priesthood of all believers", which holds that all Christians stand on equal footing before God.
- Can you comment on the objections above, given that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments."

**While it is true that many have criticized the full communion agreement with the Episcopal Church USA, it has been lauded by at least as many within the church in that it has increased our capacity for mission and ministry in some settings. Like all full communion agreements, it required a super majority at a churchwide assembly. Some who opposed this relationship throughout the church's deliberation maintain their objection. But the participation in the historic episcopate does not contradict any doctrine of the Lutheran tradition, including the confessional definition of the church which states that the church "is this assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." (AC, Article VII) And there is no yielding on the Lutheran notion of the priesthood of all believers, especially when you consider that the most significant decisions made by and on behalf of this church are made by groups that are required to include a majority of lay people. (An assembly of this church, or council, and in this synod, ministry commissions require 60% lay membership).**

*Response: The Bishop makes the point that participation in the historic episcopate does not contradict any doctrine of the Lutheran tradition. However, it is not "participation" in the historic episcopate that was/is in question. The issue is "joining" another church based on the requirement of adherence or adoption of the historic episcopate (something other than the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments). That is in direct conflict with Article VII as stated above. Called to Common Mission also changed the direction of the understanding of lay ministry*

*(against Luther's "priesthood of all believers") as the ELCA adopted the Episcopalian distinct difference between bishops, pastors, and lay persons.*

9) About Scriptural interpretation regarding homosexuality.

A major concern for many within the church is how the ELCA was able to look at certain passages of Scripture regarding homosexuality which talk about it as sin in the Old and New Testaments, but then is interpreted as not referring to lifelong monogamous relationships. Many consider the Scriptural witness regarding homosexuality to be consistent and pervasive in both Testaments.

- Please comment on how the ELCA views Scripture in the context of the CWA vote to approve lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
- Please comment on how members of our congregation who disagree with that interpretation of Scripture may find a home in this church.

**I've tried to express clearly that this church has acted based on the premise that the historical consensus regarding this issue no longer holds within this church. Scriptural interpretation has never been so uniform to establish a single understanding of what God is "saying" to believers and how that Divine address impacts our life. The debate about universalism is a case in point. Based on a faithful reading of the Bible, people find themselves in different places along a spectrum. A member of St. Mark's wrote me after the council meeting asking, "isn't it true that all are universally invited to accept Christ into their lives?" The writer goes on to say, "How do I know what that response might be, even as late as the time of death, and who am I to judge who God will finally save?" Good questions from a person of faith still wrestling with a big issue.**

**On the matter of homosexuality, while there are many who continue to see a single way to interpret Scripture on this topic – a viewpoint to hold in high regard for many reasons, including the history that lies behind it – there are more and more faithful people, including renown Biblical scholars who have come to a different interpretation. People may disagree with this different interpretation. I will continue to argue that there is a welcome place in this church for people who hold opposing views on this issue. With regard to feeling "at home," this is a usually a function of whether or not there is a welcome place in the local congregation. My experience suggests that congregations that keep these sorts of issues at the forefront, as if they are central to their/our life together, end up alienating more and more people, even when the intended goal is to hold people together.**

*Response: It appears that the Bishop is making the case for Universalism as a possible acceptable view of Scripture within our church. Again within orthodox Christianity, this has never been the case. In regards to the member of St. Mark's who wrote to the Bishop, the answer is that none of us should ever judge anyone into heaven or hell; that is the business of God. The issue here is that some are judging everyone to heaven; again, that is the work of God, not humans.*

*Regarding the alternative view of homosexuality through Scriptural interpretation, there does not seem to be a "welcome place" within the synod. The ELCA has made it mandatory that all synodical activity abide by the new ELCA visions and expectations for clergy (meaning they cannot object to the new CWA ruling regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender in ministry). This means that members of St. Mark's who would like to serve on synodical or national boards would not be able to exercise their right to act on their beliefs (if they are contrary to the ELCA policy on GLBT ordinations or unions) while serving in a synodical capacity. The difficulty is then finding a voice amongst synodical or national leadership that will support those who object to the ELCA CWA vote.*

*Regarding keeping such issues at the forefront, it has been this church council's practice to not sweep issues under the rug, but instead make sure that our congregation has the best possible understanding of the issues in order to make sound decisions regarding our relationship with the ELCA.*

- 10) About public statements by the Presiding Bishop: Our ELCA Bishop Hanson has issued several public statements regarding the current political situation in Israel. There are many who have viewed his statements as being pro-Palestinian or at least biased towards the Palestinian viewpoint of the situation. Attached/Available is the most recent statement and Pastor Fruhling's response to the Bishop. There have been others similar in nature. Can you comment regarding:
- The need for our bishop to make such public statements speaking on behalf of 4.5 million Lutherans
  - The seemingly consistent bias towards one side of this conflict...

**Bishop Hanson lives out his calling as presiding bishop in a way that seems most fitting to him. He understands that role to include public statements on matters of great importance. His approach in this arena is a bit different from that of his predecessor who approached this and other aspects of this ministry differently than his predecessor. In other words, it is the presiding bishop, in an effort to be faithful, who determines when and why public statements are issued. Contributing to the complexity of making such decisions, Bishop Hanson currently serves as both presiding bishop of the ELCA and president of the Lutheran World Federation. When commenting on such a public statement, Pastor Fruhling's approach of writing directly to the presiding bishop is the correct response. With regard to the assumed bias that Bishop Hanson's statements reflect, I know from first hand experience that he is deliberate whenever possible to meet with and encourage both Israeli leaders and Palestinians. And I know that this historic conflict can never be distilled down to one side or another. There are many facets to the tensions that contribute to the violence in the region. But there is one bias that is intentional and it has less to do with Palestinians as an aggregate group and more to do with the Christian presence in the Holy Land. The numbers of people witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ in Israel and the West Bank continue to diminish at alarming rates. This church seeks to support that witness, primarily through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.**

*Response: In the time since Bishop Burk has shared this answer, ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson has come out with very strong statements regarding immigration reform (following the Arizona change in immigration law) and the BP oil spill in the gulf (including condemning large industries). While we may disagree on these sorts of issues and the answers to solving the inherent problems, we can agree that solutions are more complex than meets the eye. That is why it would seem to be a better recommendation to call people to the table for better solutions – in the Middle East as well as along our Mexico border or in the Gulf.*

- 11) About the Board of Pensions policy regarding abortions: Please describe the ELCA Board of Pensions policy on funding abortions, as you understand it, in light of the following ELCA statement on abortion adopted by a 2/3 majority at an ELCA Churchwide Assembly:
- “This church recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion.” Among such reasons they list threats to the physical life of the mother, cases of rape or incest, and the likelihood of fetal abnormalities. “An abortion is morally responsible in those cases in which continuation of a pregnancy presents a clear threat to the physical life of the woman.” <http://www.elca.org/SocialStatements/abortion/>
- The ELCA lobby against the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act has troubled those who feel this is inconsistent with our ELCA policy stated above. Can you comment on this?

- Do you see an inconsistency with our ELCA Social Statement and 1) the practices of funding abortions through the Board of Pensions and 2) the practice of lobbying Congress in favor of Partial Birth Abortion?

**This is an example of a question that is best addressed to the source of the concern.**

**After one phone call to the Board of Pensions (I talked with a health advocate), I received the following response regarding the question of funding abortion procedures:**

The ELCA health plan covers an array of medically necessary procedures to support the health and well being of pastors, rostered laypersons, lay employees and their families. Moral deliberation is a key component of the ELCA social statement on abortion and, as such, moral and ethical issues surrounding abortion procedures are matters of serious discussion in the Board of Pensions' administration of the plan. With a person's moral deliberation, the plan may cover miscarriages/abortions that are performed in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. Please note, physicians use numerous medical codes to describe the medical term "abortion", and the term abortion applies to miscarriages, therapeutic abortions and elective abortions. As the plan administrator, Blue Cross and Blue Shield does not question either the patient or doctor about the details of a miscarriage/abortion performed in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy – beyond the information provided on the submitted medical claim. Therefore, while it is not the intention of the ELCA health plan to reimburse elective procedures that are not medically necessary, it is possible that an elective abortion could be reimbursed under the health plan. At the same time, it would cause great hardship for members who have experienced a miscarriage or therapeutic abortion to be asked to complete a questionnaire on the cause of the abortion prior to receiving reimbursement for their medical expenses. The ELCA Church Council amended the health plan in 1997, to exclude coverage of late--term abortions, except when the life of the mother is threatened or when the fetus has lethal abnormalities indicating death is imminent. "Late- term" abortion is interpreted as an abortion received after 20 weeks of pregnancy. The 1999 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA voted to continue moral deliberation on abortion, but declined to amend the ELCA social statement on abortion (approved in 1991).

**Regarding the advocacy efforts of the ELCA, I spoke with our staff in Washington, D.C. and learned that they had spoken with Pastor Fruhling. They provided me with a copy of the written response they sent to him and described the content and nature of the conversation. Again, Pastor Fruhling's direct contact is the best way to deal with concerns. As for this church's advocacy work, I know it well from my work on issues related to hunger, particularly childhood nutrition. The approach is decidedly nonpartisan.**

*Response: The ELCA staff in Washington DC lobbied representatives on the legislation to ban Partial Birth Abortion during 2002-2003. (They lobbied against the ban.) The ELCA social statement on abortion is not in question for most people. The interpretation of that statement by the Board of Pensions and the ELCA lobby against Partial Birth Abortion in 2002-2003 raise some serious questions for many people.*