

Q&A with the First Lutheran Church Ad Hoc Education Task Force—May 2010

I. Why the task force?

At the November 2009 Church Council Meeting, then-Congregation President Jeff Jorgenson called for the formation of an Education Ad Hoc Task Force to address issues raised in a petition presented to the council signed by over 100 members of the congregation. Task Force members were recruited and the first meeting was held in December 2009. The task force faced various obstacles and did not meet again. At the Annual Congregation Meeting in January 2010, congregation members encouraged the task force be revived with new members. Current-Congregation President Shelly Maes recruited members to the new task force, and the first meeting was held on March 1st. The task force is committed to focusing on the future—and pray God's help and healing on our church family.

II. Who is on the task force?

The task force is comprised of Shirley Anderson-Porisch, Cathy Berg, Tom Hey, Bruce Lamprecht, Chris Ulrich, Congregation Vice President Jason Swenson, and Congregation President Shelly Maes.

The task force recognizes the conflict that has arisen in our congregation as a result of the Church-Wide Assembly vote. This is a difficult time for First Lutheran, as well as a great majority of ELCA congregations across the nation. In fact, each task force member has his/her own position on the Assembly action—and positions differ across the task force. The task force recognizes, though, that each position is heart-felt and respect must be shown to each member regardless of their position. Most importantly, members of this task force all care deeply for each and every member of the family of First Lutheran, and this passion for the church family is what drives the task force to find ways to build a better and brighter ministry.

III. What led up to the First Lutheran Resolution addressing the Church Wide Assembly vote of 2009?

Council meetings following the 2009 Church Wide Assembly vote were both stressful and full of despair. There were many questions about what the vote meant to First Lutheran, what changes would be seen at our church because of this, and more. Frustration levels continued to rise each month, with members leaving the church and people not feeling fulfilled at First Lutheran. After numerous phone calls and conversations with a number of congregation members, the task force felt it was essential to the future of First Lutheran to make a statement on what the Assembly action meant to our church and to reaffirm our mission in Christ. After looking at what other ELCA churches did to help maintain harmony within their church, a draft resolution was created.

IV. How was the resolution passed?

The resolution was presented to the church council via email four days prior to the April 2010 Church Council meeting so council members could study it and pray for God's guidance. At the council meeting, there were many questions and answers about the proposed resolution—all in a very respectful and peaceful manner. In the end, there were some minor wording changes—and the resolution passed. Ultimately, what the resolution did was state that First Lutheran practices and policies will not change as a result of the Assembly vote—our ministry is the same now as prior to the vote.

V. Where is the task force going?

The task force also decided to do some follow up with those families who left First Lutheran for another church family after the Assembly action. At this point, these are the only personal interviews being conducted. While we recognize that some of these families left very unhappy with our church, the task force still felt the need to touch base with them to see why they left, what we could do to bring them back, what suggestions they had for us, etc. The task force thought this could be very helpful in our efforts.

VI. Another survey?

There have been many questions about “Why another survey? Didn’t we just complete a survey?” The answer to that question is “Yes, we did have a survey completed by the stewardship committee in November 2009”. This intent of that survey was to gather information to help the budgeting process....and possibly help the direction of the task force. The survey results showed there was division among the congregation on what to do regarding the ELCA vote—but did not give clear direction on what to do. The task force hopes the current survey will provide more comprehensive results which will in the end help bind our congregation back together and re-build our ministry. With God’s help, First Lutheran will create a future of serving, praising and loving God and one another....with a ministry that will be welcoming for all.

VII. Tentative timeline of events for the task force.

Surveys will be collected through May 15, 2010. The task force will come together after that date to review the comments and prepare a written report to be presented to the council at the June 2010 meeting. The task force plans to organize its report by the various themes shown through the surveys, with recommendations on these issues. After review of the report at the June meeting, the council may provide additional direction to the task force based on the results.

VIII. Please join the task force in praying the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, You are intimately aware of the struggles we are experiencing -- the pain and the despair. You know the desire of our hearts to be healed of this. We ask now for Your healing touch on our family at First Lutheran. We know that You are able and that just like in Bible times, You can heal us and make us whole again.

We also understand that You will choose what is best for our congregation. We pray that through our trials, that we will draw close to You -- that You will be our comfort and strength. We pray that ultimately, whatever happens, You will be glorified through each and every one of us. And we ask you to be with our Church Council, the Ad-Hoc Committee, and our Pastors as they lead us through these trying and unknown times. May your Holy Spirit continue to work and flow in our Church and within ourselves. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.