



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Lutheran Denomination Receives Pastor Lura Groen onto Clergy Roster

On All Saints Sunday, November 7, Lura Groen will be the first clergy person allowed onto the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod under new policy regarding LGBT clergy.

Previously, LGBT clergy could serve, but they were expected to remain celibate.

"No Longer Strangers," a Service of Reception will be held at Grace Lutheran Church, address 2515 Waugh Drive, Houston, TX 77006, at 4:00 p.m. November 7, with Bishop Michael Rinehart presiding. Everyone is welcome.

In August of 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted to make changes in its ministry rostering policies. The ELCA eliminated a policy that precluded non-celibate gay and lesbian persons from serving as pastors. Gay and lesbian people have long been pastors in the Lutheran Church, but the ELCA previously required them to be celibate. The change in policy removes the requirement that gay and lesbian pastors be celibate, allowing single gay and lesbian pastors, as well as those in lifelong committed relationships to serve as clergy and rostered lay leaders.

"Members of our 10,000 congregations are not of one mind about this policy change," said Michael Rinehart, Bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, "however a majority of Lutherans are now willing to leave to local congregations the decision of calling non-celibate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender pastors, as opposed to that decision being made by denominational policy." The ELCA's vote enables congregations to make these decisions on the basis of local mission needs.

"Our Candidacy Committee enthusiastically approved Lura for reception on the roster," said Bishop Rinehart. "She is an extraordinarily gifted pastor with a great deal of theological depth and a passion for those disillusioned with the church. This church is stronger with her."

"Lutherans have a long history of breaking with tradition. We started allowing married priests nearly 500 years ago. We began ordaining women in 1970. Some are disappointed with this decision, but many Lutherans tend to

have a Lake Wobegonish, live-and-let-live mentality. The institutional church is human, and therefore under the power of sin. The church has done incredible good, but we have also been guilty of Jewish persecution, inquisitions that targeted anyone who dissented with the official teaching of the church, unholy crusades – all errors that brought hurt rather than healing. The post-WWII-holocaust church must be vigilant about combating racism, hate and exclusion. We must constantly be in a state of reformation."

"The Bible has been used to support slavery, racism and the subjugation of women. So many get naturally suspicious when the church is tempted to use Scripture to exclude or marginalize people. Many feel it safer, and truer to the gospel to err on the side of grace, rather than law."

The Rev. Lura N. Groen is a graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis MD and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Prior to seminary, Pastor Lura was a two-year member of Lutheran Volunteer Corps, serving as a case manager to homeless people in Baltimore MD and Washington DC.

Groen was active in community life during seminary, including serving as Student Body President. She received the Winters Scholarship for academic excellence and potential for ministry, the Traci L. Maul Award for leadership potential for ministry, active contribution to seminary life, and academic strength the Atonement-Asbury Park Preaching Award, and was on the Dean's List. Pastor Lura completed her internship at Trinity Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, PA.

"The Church is opening up" said Pastor Groen, "The Lutheran Church is more welcoming than most people think it is. I am proud of the ELCA for publicly celebrating the ministry of myself and so many other pastors who were excluded by the previous policy."

Pastor Groen was ordained at Grace Evangelical Lutheran on July 26, 2008. The service has been called an extraordinary ordination because it was outside the usual practices of the ELCA. Pastor Groen was credentialed for ministry by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries which, prior to the changes in the ELCA ministry policies, supported gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender pastors for ministry through an alternative process, anticipating their eventual inclusion onto the ELCA roster. The ordination was not recognized by the ELCA at the time.

Grace Lutheran Church is located in the heart of Houston's Montrose neighborhood, long a haven for the city's LGBT community. Founded in 1922 the church is a "Reconciling in Christ" congregation, meaning that they "Value and accept all people in the name of Jesus, regardless of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity". Sundays at Grace include a vibrant mixture of people from all walks of life.

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was reprimanded in 2008 for calling a pastor not on the ELCA clergy roster. The Rite of Reception on November 7 will indicate the ELCA's official recognition of Rev. Lura Groen's ordination and affirmation of her past ministry. At the time of the service, the reprimand of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church will also be removed.