

# **Victims Of Visions and Expectations: Essays by Pastors Expelled from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

**Essay Number One**  
Pastor Paul Johnson  
Edited by Lars Clausen



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## 1. Introduction

**Paul Johnson** – Born 1946

Ordained in the Lutheran church – 1972

Forced to resign as Assistant to the Bishop, LaCrosse, Wisconsin – 1991

Removed from the ELCA roster – 1992

Currently a member of Urbandale United Church of Christ, Iowa.

Paul's words (1999): "I want to tell you about the journey that brought me to that realization and the impact of my struggle and acceptance of my sexuality on my personal life, marriage, and career as a pastor.

"My purpose is not to ask for sympathy or pity. It is not to excuse or dismiss wrongful actions and mistakes I have made. I am aware that it was a "jolting" experience for many of my colleagues, church members in the synod, and people in the community when they discovered in May of 1991 that I am gay. Because I had been very closeted and had portrayed myself as a heterosexual man, husband and father, people felt betrayed and deceived by this revelation. My purpose is to let you see some of the struggle that preceded this revelation. I want you to know that through all these years of struggle and beyond, my belief that God has called me to ordained ministry and my commitment to be a pastor has always been a strong and deciding factor in my life."

Paul Johnson knew already as an eighth grader that he was called to be a minister. He was ordained in 1972 and served for 19 years before he was outed to the bishop of the LaCrosse Area Synod in Wisconsin and forced to resign his position there as assistant to the bishop.

Rather than write new words for this story, Paul provided material from pivotal times in his life. Paul provides details of his arduous journey toward accepting his sexual identity, including self-denial, marriage to his wife, closeted questions, suicidal thoughts, expulsion from the ELCA, and finding his partner David. Paul shares his 1999 pledge of celibacy and the church's continued rejection as he sought reinstatement as a pastor. Finally, he left the Lutheran church to take membership in an Open and Affirming United Church of Christ congregation. On the thirtieth anniversary of Paul's ordination, 11 years after being forced to resign, he wrote a long letter that is also included here. He concluded with these words.

I am sad that church leaders mostly see this as a problem for gay and lesbian people. It is really the church's problem. Anytime the church alienates and excludes a large number of people it has a very big problem. I am sad that the church hasn't yet recognized that.

I am glad for the people in groups like the Extraordinary Candidacy Committee who look for calls for gay and lesbian people and boldly challenge the church. And sometimes I am sad that I don't have the energy to fight in that way for my call.

Thirty years ago today I was ordained as a Lutheran pastor. The church has said "no" to my ordination, but God has not. And I still think of myself as a Lutheran pastor. But there will be no celebration today, and I am very sad!

Paul's story is one of hundreds of ELCA pastors and seminarians who have been removed from official ministry simply because of being gay or lesbian. After reading Paul's experience perhaps you will find new or renewed energy to end the ELCA's policy of expelling partnered gay and lesbian pastors from its roster of ordained ministers.

## 2. Why Tell This Story Now?

Since the age of 13 Paul Johnson wanted to be a pastor. He served in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) until he was outed to his bishop in the LaCrosse, Wisconsin Synod in 1991. A front-page headline in the La Crosse Tribune announced his expulsion from the church, "GAY PASTOR RESIGNS POST."

On August 8, 2006 another ELCA pastor was formally charged with pastoring while gay. Pastor Bradley Schmeling currently faces an ELCA trial and expulsion from the roster if he is convicted. The same fate, whether by trial or by silent pressure to resign, has ended ELCA pastoral service for hundreds of lesbian and gay pastors since the founding of the denomination in 1988.

During this current time that Pastor Schmeling's trial is being prepared, Paul Johnson is making his story available to help expose the injustice and the damage caused by the ELCA's Visions and Expectations policy. This policy specifically excludes partnered lesbian and gay pastors from the roster of the church.

Paul's story needs a wide reading, because stories have the power to change rules and create justice.

### Three easy ways to pass this story on.

1. You can print this PDF and post it at church or mail it to church members.
2. You can email this PDF to churches and church members.
3. You can direct visitors to this article  
on the Internet at [www.straightintogayamerica.com/visionsandexpectations](http://www.straightintogayamerica.com/visionsandexpectations)

## 3. About the Editor.

Lars Clausen is a Lutheran Pastor (not currently rostered). He has been an ally of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) equality since his own expulsion from seminary in 1989 ([www.straightintogayamerica.com/visionsandexpectations](http://www.straightintogayamerica.com/visionsandexpectations).) In 2005, Clausen unicycled for five weeks and 1,000 miles to gather everyday stories of LGBT people. His book, ***Straight Into Gay America: My Unicycle Journey for Equal Rights***, puts a human face on LGBT life, as well as exposing the hardships created by church and state policies. Told as an honest and revealing travelogue, ***Straight Into Gay America*** helps readers understand life and issues that LGBT people face on a daily basis.

Lars Clausen maintains the website, [www.straightintogayamerica.com](http://www.straightintogayamerica.com) and has dedicated a section of this site as a clearing house of information for the Bradley Schmeling trial. As editor, Clausen will also compile the stories of willing LGBT pastors who have been removed from the ELCA roster. These stories will be distributed as widely as possible to make known the devastating human cost of the ELCA Visions and Expectations document. To contact Lars Clausen with questions or to offer stories, please email [lars@straightintogayamerica.com](mailto:lars@straightintogayamerica.com)

## 4. About Paul Johnson

Paul Johnson offers us five remarkable pieces of writing, including an essay from his daughter. The most poignant piece is his 1999 essay to the ELCA candidacy committee, requesting to be reinstated as a pastor in the ELCA. Paul believed so strongly in his call to ordained ministry that he and his partner agree to stop the sexual part of their relationship so that Paul could be in accord with the ELCA policy in Visions and Expectations, which states,

*Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.*

In providing these writings, Paul wrote

I am going to attach a number of things which I wrote over the years to tell my story in various contexts rather than start over and write a new story about me.

One of them is titled: "Paul's Story for Candidacy Committee". I need to briefly explain the context for that. In 1999 I applied to be reinstated as an ELCA pastor. My argument was that the "Visions and Expectation" document says that if you are homosexual you can't be in a sexual relationship, but it doesn't say you can't be in a relationship that is not sexual. It seemed so important to me to be a pastor that Dave and I decided to end the sexual part of our relationship and for me to apply for reinstatement based on now fulfilling the letter of the Visions and Expectations document. I wrote this document for the committee. As I read it again it is probably more revealing than I should have been. The committee turned me down. The "rules" said they were supposed to provide me with the reasons for their refusal in writing, but they steadfastly refused to do that. They expect gay clergy to follow the rules, but failed to follow the rules themselves.

The writings Paul shares offer a very personal view into one person's pain-filled journey toward understanding his sexuality and dealing with his call to serve as a pastor in the Lutheran Church.

In responding to my request for his story, Paul wrote to me:

I just read your story about your seminary struggle. Nothing about it surprises me. I can identify with the anger as well. Just sharing my story with you today has brought back some of my anger, disappointment, and sadness. That's why it took me several days to respond. I knew that would happen. Dave and I now belong to Urbandale United Church of Christ...I got to the point where I could no longer attend a Lutheran church. I felt badly every Sunday. It is nice to be very involved in a congregation and not feel bad all the time.

With gratitude and respect, here is Paul Johnson's story.

## **5. Paul Johnson's Writings**

### **Coming to Terms with My Sexuality and My Call to Ministry: (Some background reflections for the La Crosse Area Synod Candidacy Committee) November 29, 1999**

I cannot tell you when I first figured out that I might be gay. All I can do is interpret my life from the place I am now and make some observations about what shows up for me now as "clues" regarding my sexual orientation. I didn't come to an acceptance of my sexual orientation until December of 1984. I want to tell you about the journey that brought me to that realization and the impact of my struggle and acceptance of my sexuality on my personal life, marriage, and career as a pastor.

My purpose is not to ask for sympathy or pity. It is not to excuse or dismiss wrongful actions and mistakes I have made. I am aware that it was a "jolting" experience for many of my colleagues, church members in the synod, and people in the community when they discovered in May of 1991 that I am gay. Because I had been very closeted and had portrayed myself as a heterosexual man, husband and father, people felt betrayed and deceived by this revelation. My purpose is to let you see

some of the struggle that preceded this revelation. I want you to know that through all these years of struggle and beyond, my belief that God has called me to ordained ministry and my commitment to be a pastor has always been a strong and deciding factor in my life.

When I look back at my life as a child and an adolescent I can see some clues regarding my sexuality, but I couldn't see them then. As a child of 7 or 8 I felt different. I was more interested in playing "house" than most boys my age. I was shy and not very aggressive when it came to rough, playground games. As a child and adolescent I often befriended other children who seemed left out or pushed aside for some reason. In high school I was not involved in any sports. I counted several girls among my good friends, but didn't have girl friends. I didn't date at all until my senior year in high school and then only two dates the whole year. It wasn't that I was a loner. I had a lot of friends and was involved in a lot of non-sports activities in school. I attended sports events as a spectator. I am aware that I experienced a sexual attraction to several other males in my adolescent years. My best friend, Jim, used to stay over at our house and when he did we shared a double bed. I recall sometimes waking up in the night with strong feelings of sexual desire for him. If someone had asked me then if I had homosexual feelings I'm sure I would have said "no." Though I occasionally wondered if I was "normal," I preferred to assume that everyone felt the same way. In addition I didn't possess any understanding of what it meant for someone to be gay or homosexual. My only image of a gay person was someone who was sick and perverted and I wasn't that. I didn't meet anyone I knew to be gay until I was 30. The feeling that I was different was quite easy for me to explain away. There was another way in which I was obviously different. I had an identical twin brother. We were always identified as being different because of that.

What did become clear to me, as an eighth grader is that God was calling me to ordained ministry. I don't remember the specifics about how I "heard" God's call. I think it was like a persistent thought that I could not ignore or deny. I remember that it seemed sacred and special. I also recall feeling frightened. I think the fear came from the thought that God was expecting so much of me. I told my twin brother, Peter, about my "call." He replied that he believed God was calling him to ministry too. We didn't discuss it again until many years later. The only other person I told about my call back then was my pastor. I told Pastor Hansen when I had a private interview before confirmation. My memory is that he didn't take it seriously. He seemed to discount it. It was as if he didn't believe God would actually call an eighth grader to ordained ministry. He went on to talk to me about how God might want me to be a farmer. It was largely because of that experience that I didn't tell anyone else for several years. I didn't want to risk having other people discount or maybe even ridicule my call. So it became a very private, but important secret for several years.

I was a sophomore in college when I announced to my family and church that I was planning to go to seminary. When Peter and I talked about it about 12 years ago he admitted that he was still feeling "called", but that he couldn't decide to go to seminary because I had. At that time in our life, during college, we were both struggling with an identity crisis, which was centered on the difficulty of being identical twins. We were intentionally trying hard to be different from the other. I suspect if Peter had made an announcement about going to seminary before I did that I would have chosen not to. It is interesting that as an adult, Peter became a Quaker. He belonged to the branch of the Quaker church that doesn't have professional clergy and he became a real leader in the Friends church he was a part of. At this time in my life my sexuality was not in conflict with my call to ministry since I was unaware of my sexuality.

I remember having questions and concerns about my sexuality as a freshman in college, but I didn't talk to anyone about it. At the end of my freshman year I began dating a woman and that relieved my fears that I might not be "normal." The fact that a woman could sexually arouse me was reassuring. What I didn't realize then is that, as a 19-year-old, I could be so easily sexually aroused that it wasn't really proof of anything. Our relationship lasted a year and a half. It never progressed beyond hugging and kissing. I was insistent on being very "moral." Given my conservative Christian

background it was clear to me that sexual intercourse before marriage would be a terrible wrong. Part of the reason our relationship ended was because she wanted to move ahead sexually and I refused. I wonder now whether it was easier for me to remain “sexually pure” because in fact I was gay?

I began my relationship with my second girl friend in my junior year in college. That was with the woman I married three and a half years later. Again it was important to me not to have sexual intercourse until we were married, and we did not. When we did get married sex was exciting and I was convinced that the fears that had sometimes plagued me about my sexuality were unfounded.

Just after we were married we moved to New York City for internship. I began to question my sexuality again during that year. About nine months after we were married we went to see an off Broadway play titled, “Oh Calcutta!” The play had a lot of nudity and I was surprised and disturbed to discover that I was looking at the men, not the women. I didn’t talk to my wife or anyone else about that.

I don’t think there were any other defining moments regarding my sexuality for the next few years. I continued to sometimes think about my fears that I might be sick or a pervert. I was also very committed to being ordained, and even though it was not discussed much in the church back then I think I believed being gay would be incompatible with being a pastor. I certainly realized it would be incompatible with being a husband and a father. When I was ordained on June 4, 1972, my wife was 8 months pregnant with our first daughter. At that point my commitment to being a good husband and father was strong, and I believed my fears about homosexuality were foolish and ungrounded. I was also very clear about God’s call to me and I was sure that if there were any problems with my sexuality God would take care of it. When such fears arose my response always included prayer. I repeatedly asked God to remove this evil from me. If homosexuality could be “cured” by prayer I would be straight. For at least 15 years I prayed fervently and often about it.

Over the next few years I began to look for things to read about homosexuality. Almost everything I found was negative. When I looked in the Bible I was sure the passages that referred to same sex sexual activity clearly condemned homosexuals.

My first parish was a two point rural parish in the middle of Wisconsin. I was there for two and a half years and it was a difficult time for me. Part of the problem is that I was familiar with Norwegian background congregations where people expressed their feelings by saying nothing. These churches were German in background and folks related to their pastor by fighting with him. They didn’t understand why I took it personally. The best thing that happened while we were in Harrisville was the birth of our first daughter on August 4, 1972. I very much enjoyed being a father and just after we moved to Mindoro in October of 1974 my wife got pregnant again. I had felt like a failure in many ways in my first parish and left there very depressed. An important part of my depression was the struggle with my sexuality, which kept coming up for me.

My awareness of sexual attraction to other men became more frequent and intense and had me thinking about suicide often. After feeling suicidal for several months I finally decided to kill myself in June of 1975. I came very close to carrying out my plan, but instead decided to talk to a good friend, a Lutheran Social Services Chaplain. With his help I entered Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse and spent eleven days in the psychiatric unit. My psychiatrist and an anti-depressant kept me from thinking about suicide most of the time for the next couple of years. I did however remain suicidal for the next eleven years. I was able to resolve a number of things with my psychiatrist, but the one thing I didn’t talk to him about was my sexuality. I still held that as too terrible a problem to reveal to anyone. I continued to suffer about that alone.

Our second daughter was born on July 24, 1975. I was glad that my suicide plans had failed. My joy was multiplied at being the father of two lovely daughters. In those years my marriage relationship

was quite good. Even though we had an active sex life I had begun to feel more strongly that something was missing and incomplete about that part of my life.

In 1976 my wife and I attended a four-day program on human sexuality in Minneapolis which was jointly sponsored by the American Lutheran Church and the University of Minnesota Medical School. One of the days we had a panel that included a gay man, a lesbian, a bisexual woman, a transvestite, and a transsexual. The gay man on the panel had been a Presbyterian minister. I was 30 and it was the first time I ever met anyone who claimed to be gay. That evening we were divided into groups of 10 or so and went to cocktail parties in homes of gay or lesbian couples. I was surprised at how "normal" Peter and Hans seemed and how lovely and comfortable their home seemed. Some of our group expressed interest in going to a gay bar after the cocktail party. My wife and I went with two other couples to a bar called Suttons. I guess I was expecting a seedy, dirty place and I was surprised to discover it was a very classy, disco bar. It seemed strange to see men dancing with men. The other two husbands were clearly uncomfortable there, but I was not. In fact I felt rather disgusted with them when they started referring to our waiter as "Swish." It was a very eye-opening day for me. I didn't know such places existed and I had not met a homosexual before! It surprised me that the men I met that day were so confident, self-assured, and so well adjusted. The image I had invented about homosexuals was that they were sick, perverted, miserable human beings.

My struggle intensified the next few years. Sometime in 1978 or 1979 I came up with a crazy idea. My crazy, immoral idea was that I needed to have an affair with another woman. I rationalized that if I could perform sexually with another woman it would mean I wasn't gay. Also if anyone, including my wife, found out they would also be clear that I was not gay. I went so far as to identifying possible candidates for my plan and I acted in a bit of a seductive way toward a couple of them. I thank God, that before I had progressed very far with my plan, I figured out that it wasn't what I wanted to do and that it would further complicate my life and the lives of people I loved rather than resolve anything.

I finally found a couple of books that spoke of homosexuality in a positive way including one by a Catholic priest named Father John McNiel, titled: **The Church and the Homosexual**. I was beginning to think that if I was gay it might not mean I was a sick, despicable person. I was clear however that it would destroy my marriage and put my ministry in jeopardy. Both of those thoughts deeply troubled me and again led to many fervent prayers. Those years were also very lonely ones because there was no one I could talk to. When I think about it, I am surprised I didn't kill myself. If I had no one would have known why. My children would have wondered forever why I had done such a thing. A pastor near where I live now took his own life a couple months ago. A few of us know why, but I don't think his wife, children or congregation know. Few people in the church are aware of how many pastors live with such terror and are often not aware even when they die as a result of it!

I am convinced my love for my wife and our children kept me from the suicide solution. In 1978 we began the process to adopt a Korean child. Our son arrived from Korea at the age of two and a half on January 10, 1980. Again my joy about being a father was multiplied. I often regret not figuring out my sexuality earlier and I am deeply sorry for the pain I caused my wife and other people; however, one thing I have never regretted is the three children I am privileged to be a father to.

In 1980 I came up with a new plan – a new rationalization. I started thinking that in order to finally put the struggle about my sexuality behind me I would have to try having sex with another man. My misguided thinking was that if I finally tried it I would find it disgusting and distasteful and I could finally put such thoughts out of my head. I succeeded in my plan. It was a brief encounter with another man in a hotel room. It was not fulfilling. He was neither attractive nor understanding. In spite of that I didn't find the experience disgusting and distasteful. It was a very significant moment in my life. It began me on a path of coming to terms with my sexuality rather than denying it. At

that time I refused to think of myself as gay, but I began to entertain the thought that I might be bisexual.

In 1982 I finally talked to someone else about my sexuality. My choice of someone to talk to was another pastor. Rev. David Assmus was the Director of Sugar Creek Bible Camp and also a member of my congregation, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Viroqua. (We moved from Mindoro to Viroqua in the spring of 1981.) Dave was a very good friend and I believe he saved my life over the next few years by being available for me to talk to. He remains a close, loving friend to this day.

I began to think I might be gay, not just bisexual. One of the discoveries I made that led me to think that is the realization that I have never had a dream about sex with a woman. I recall many of my dreams and as far as I can remember my sexual dreams have always involved men.

By the fall of 1984 I was having conversations with Dave about whether I was gay or just “sick.” I really wasn’t sure. In conversation with Dave I finally decided I needed to talk with my identical twin brother, Peter. The way I saw it then was that if Peter shared the same sort of feelings then it would mean that I was gay. On the other hand if he couldn’t identify with my struggle then it would mean that I was sick – psychologically messed up. In spite of my closeness to Peter, we had never discussed this issue.

At the time Peter and his wife and daughter were living in Stillwater, Minnesota. I registered for a continuing education week at Luther Seminary and made arrangements to stay with Peter and his wife. It was the week after Thanksgiving in 1984. We talked on Wednesday evening. It was with great fear that I brought the subject up, but it was a great relief to discover that his struggle had been virtually identical to mine. I now had someone to talk to besides my friend Dave and this person was able to understand fully my feelings and struggle. For the first time I was able to say, “I am gay!” That December I felt like I had been born again, but it also was the beginning of the most difficult time of my life. My acceptance of my sexuality was very positive, but it put into question other things that had been very important to me. The thought of what it would mean to me, as a father of three wonderful children, was very troubling. I thought it would mean my marriage would soon be over. I didn’t know if I could continue to be a pastor. I was clear that the church considered it incompatible for clergy to be gay!

I began to worry a lot about what would happen if I were to be found out. My fears about how it would affect others led me to withdraw from many things I had been involved with. In addition to that my fears were depleting my energy. I had been very active in many ways in the Viroqua Conference and the larger church. I withdrew from all of those activities. I stopped most of my involvement with Sugar Creek Bible Camp because I didn’t want anyone to associate the camp with me if I were outed. People began asking my friend, Dave Assmus, what was wrong with me because it was as if I had dropped out of sight.

Over the years there had begun to be more friction between my wife and me. Though I wouldn’t have admitted it at the time, I suspect I was the primary cause of that. At least I am quite sure that my struggle with my sexuality prevented me from being committed to resolve differences with my wife.

In December of 1984 I was willing to give up my marriage, but I wasn’t willing to give up being a father to three wonderful children or to give up my calling to be a Lutheran minister. I knew in order to be a father and a minister I would have to be closeted. I also knew that would be difficult. I had developed a reputation for being open and honest. I had felt dishonest to the people around me for a long time, but now that deception and secrecy was multiplied.



The one person I decided I could no longer be dishonest with was my wife. But I don't claim any moral high ground about that decision. The reason I was able to come out to her was that I wanted my marriage to end. I wasn't bold enough or honest enough to say that to my wife, but I was sure that she would resolve it for me. I was sure she would choose to end our marriage once she knew I was gay. I also knew the other things of value to me were at risk. She might not only divorce me, but she might try to deny me access to my children. If it came out in court that I was gay it would also mean that I would lose my career as a pastor.

On January 2, 1985, I told my wife that I am gay. I think I have only done one thing harder in my life and that was telling my children in May of 1991. As I expected she was deeply hurt and very angry. Contrary to my expectation, she didn't kick me out. Rather, she said she wanted to keep our marriage together. The next day we went to see a therapist at Lutheran Social Services in La Crosse. I remember the therapist commented at the end of a two-hour session that he didn't think he had ever seen two people in as much pain. Over the next few months we continued to see this therapist several times as well as a psychiatrist he recommended.

One of the things my wife kept saying was that there must be other pastors in our situation. She wanted to talk with other couples like us to see how they managed to deal with this. I didn't know any other gay pastors, but I decided to try to find one who was also married. Within a month I was successful at locating such a couple in Milwaukee. They invited us to come over and we made that trip in March of 1985. They invited another Lutheran pastor and his wife to join us as well. They also were in a similar situation. The couple we went to visit thought they had worked out a good arrangement. I will call them George and Helen (not their real names). Helen agreed to let George have two nights a week out. He agreed not to stay away all night, but he would be free to go to gay bars and Helen wouldn't expect him to report on his evening. George had fallen in love with another man. Helen knew about it, but was willing to live with it. George professed his love for Helen and thought it was a perfect solution. However, while we were there, Helen announced that she could no longer live that way and was leaving George. Both of the couples we met were also different in another important respect. Neither of them had children.

The visit really hadn't been very helpful. But out of our conversations my wife agreed to let me attend a gay support group in La Crosse. I went to that group three times. Each time my wife cried when I left and again when I came home. I decided to keep any contacts with gay people a secret. Much of the time I think my wife was successful at not thinking about it. Occasions when I went out of town without her were particularly difficult for her. She always assumed that I would be making contact with gay people and having sex. Sometimes her fears were justified.

I know that those years were very painful and difficult for my wife and I am sorry for the hurt I caused her. She had certainly not chosen to be in a marriage with a gay man, and now that she knew she felt trapped. I had expected her to take action to end our marriage when I came out to her. But the result was that now there were two of us who felt unwilling or unable to take action. There were two of us in the closet.

The next year and a half I lived in great fear of being found out. I was convinced that I couldn't live with my children, the church and community knowing. I was clear that if I were outed I would solve the problem by killing myself! I am grateful that I wasn't outed during that time. After many conversations with my brother, I finally came to the point of believing I could survive being outed and finally after eleven years I was no longer suicidal.

The next few years were extremely difficult ones for me. They were a time of growing distance and pain between my wife and me. It was difficult to see her pain because I was so directly responsible for it. It was also a time when I felt torn apart inside because I was living without integrity as a pastor. It was a time of pretending things were OK when they were not. It was a time of constantly

pretending to be someone I was not. I often wanted the pain of that to end maybe even if it meant the end of my ministry and my relationship with my children. One of the things that stopped me from being honest and coming out was my children. I loved them very deeply and I didn't want to miss their growing years. If I had not been outed earlier I think I would have finally had the courage to leave my marriage after my son graduated from high school.

Things were going very well for me in my ministry at Immanuel in Viroqua. When I began there it was a deeply divided and struggling congregation. The previous pastor had left after an attempt to vote him out and he had taken many families with him and started a new church. During my years there Immanuel was the only growing church in the area. I was very involved in the community including serving on the city council and being a jury commissioner. I was very respected by the church and the community, but I harbored a terrible secret. I was convinced that if the secret were known, the people in the church and community would hate me.

I lived in fear of being found out and yet sometimes I wanted to be out so the pain could finally end. I began to come out to more and more people. I knew it increased the risk that I would be outed, but I also desperately wanted support. By the time I was outed in 1991 at least 8 pastors in the synod knew I was gay.

In 1988 at the beginning of the new church (the ELCA) the decision was made by the synod council to call an Assistant to the Bishop. I had been very involved with Pastor Stefan Guttormsson and a couple of other pastors in convincing the church to "carve out" the La Crosse Area Synod. I was very pleased when Steve was elected Bishop. I had a great deal of respect for him as a pastor. I was immediately interested in the position as Assistant to the Bishop. I was convinced I had much to offer, that I would work well with Bishop Guttormsson, and that I would find the work very rewarding. I wasn't convinced I would be the choice of the Synod Council, because I knew several other well-qualified pastors would be interested.

One thing made my decision to apply difficult. That was the terrible secret I was living with! In deciding to apply I talked with several of the pastors I was out to. Let me tell you the way I was thinking when I decided to apply: If I were outed when I was the pastor at Immanuel it would deeply affect the lives of a lot of people I loved very much and with whom I had shared a lot of ministry. The transition from the previous pastor had been a difficult one. Things were going well. If I were outed and they had to deal with that it would be a real setback for Immanuel. If I were outed as the Assistant to the Bishop it would have an impact on a greater number of people over all, but less people in a direct, hurtful way. Whether or not that makes sense to you, it was that kind of thinking that led me to apply for the Assistant to the Bishop position.

I was pleased and honored to be chosen by the Synod Council. I had enjoyed being a parish pastor. I liked being the Assistant to the Bishop even more. I did contribute much in the Bishop's office. Bishop Guttormsson and I worked well together. Of course I continued to struggle with my "secret." I continued to come out to more people in spite of the increased risk of being outed.

In the spring of 1991 I was beginning to think about whether I would be willing to be a candidate for bishop a year from then, when Bishop Guttormsson would be retiring. I very much wanted to be the Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod. I thought I had the skills, the heart, and the passion to be a good bishop. But again the issue of my "secret" was in the way. My rationalization that had enabled me to apply for the position as Assistant to the Bishop wouldn't work. It would be much more difficult for the church to deal with me being outed if I was the bishop than if I was the Assistant. In May of 1991 I was leaning toward a decision that I would not be a candidate for bishop, but that I would be pleased to stay on as the Assistant if that would be the choice of the new bishop and the synod council.

In February of 1991 I attended a social ministry event in Chicago. We were divided into small groups and encouraged to share our pain and joys. There was a high expectation of confidentiality within the groups. I decided I could trust the group with my "secret." Before I shared it I told my group how important confidentiality was for me and I asked each member individually whether they would respect my confidentiality. They all assured me they would and I told them I was gay and that even though I was married I had engaged in sexual activity with other men.

When two of the women in my group got home they decided they needed to share this information about me with their bishop. That bishop contacted Bishop Guttormsson. Steve refused to believe the allegation until he had letters attesting to it from the two women. Ironically, in order to secure those letters the women were assured the letters and their identity would be kept confidential.

Bishop Guttormsson called me into his office and confronted me with the information he had on Tuesday, May 14, 1991. In the midst of many tears I admitted to the allegations. He didn't press me to resign immediately. I left the office and went to talk with one of the pastors I was out to. I also called my friend David Assmus and my brother, Peter. That afternoon I went home to Viroqua to tell my wife. On Thursday I drove to Ladysmith to tell my mother. (My father had died in 1986. I was not out to him, but I had come out to Mom in 1988) On Saturday afternoon, May 18, I came out to my three children. They were 18, 15, and 13 years of age. My wife and the LSS therapist we had gone to see in 1985 were both with us. I don't believe I have ever done anything more emotionally difficult or painful than that conversation.

On Wednesday evening, May 22, I resigned as the Assistant to the Bishop. I made it clear that I would not resign from the clergy roster. I was removed from the clergy roster by action of the synod council nearly a year later. That would have happened earlier but my in my severance agreement they had agreed to keep me and my family on the ELCA medical plan for a year. The bishop was disappointed to discover that I couldn't be part of the plan unless I was on the clergy roster. They invented an unusual status for me that year. I was designated "without call, not available for call."

On Thursday I came into my office and discovered Bishop Guttormsson was preparing a press release. I called my wife and she asked Bishop Guttormsson to delay the press release a week so that our two younger children would be out of school for the year. (Our oldest daughter had completed her first year of college. We were concerned about what the other students in school would say to our children. The bishop refused our request for a delay and mailed out the press release. What I didn't know was that he hand delivered a copy to the La Crosse Tribune. On Friday morning, May 24, 1991, my 13 year old son delivered 92 copies of the La Crosse Tribune in Viroqua with my picture and story on the front page.

The following day I prepared and mailed my press release. Part of the result was letters and editorials in the papers and lots of letters to me and to Bishop Guttormsson.

Bishop Guttormsson felt hurt and betrayed. I felt hurt, damaged, and very angry about the way I was outed and the press release. I was angry that my confidentiality had not been respected at the social ministry conference. I was angry that a press release was issued and I was angry at the timing of it. I was deeply disappointed that my call to ministry was over. That call had been the centerpiece of my life's plan and purpose for 31 years.

I want you to know that I see things differently in 1999 than I did in 1991. First of all, I blamed Bishop Guttormsson for violating my confidentiality. But I am clear that he did not know that confidentiality was an expectation at the social ministry event. He didn't know that I had gone around my group and asked for a special commitment to confidentiality. And even if he had known these things I don't think he could have ignored what he now knew about me without violating his own integrity.

More important than that: I am clear that I was setting the stage to be outed by coming out to more and more people. I really was not surprised I was outed. I was surprised by the particular source of the outing, but it was bound to happen soon. I am clear that my internal pain and lack of integrity had become so difficult to live with that I wanted it to end. I also confess that I didn't have the courage to come out and end it myself. Instead I set other people up to do it for me. So I am no longer angry with Bishop Guttormsson about that and I am sorry that I put him in a position to do what I did not have the integrity or the courage to do for myself.

In regard to the press release, from the perspective of what happened, I am grateful that he issued the press release and for the timing of it. From my conversations with many of my gay friends I realize that it was easier for me to come out to the whole world at once than to come out to the world one person at a time and the press release produced that. If the press release had been delayed a week, my children would have been out of school for the summer. They would have spent the summer wondering what the other kids were saying. They would have wondered all summer what someone might say when they met them on the street. As it was, none of the other kids in school said a single negative thing to them. So the timing turned out to be a plus, not a problem.

After I resigned I considered becoming a pastor in the Metropolitan Community Church. (the MCC is primarily a gay and lesbian church) I contacted Troy Perry, the MCC founder and President, and I was his guest at their convention in Phoenix in July. The more I explored the possibility the less I felt I would be comfortable as an MCC pastor.

I am clear I want to be an ELCA pastor and at some point I decided to look for other things to do while I waited for the ELCA to change its policy regarding homosexual clergy.

For a year and a half I remodeled kitchens in the Mason City, IA area. During that time I met and fell in love with David, a dentist in West Des Moines, IA. Dave and I have been in a committed relationship for more than seven years.

In October of 1992 my twin brother, Peter, died of a heart attack at his home in San Francisco. He had left his wife three years before and was in a committed relationship with another man. This loss was very difficult for me. We had been close all our life and since 1984 he had become a primary support person for me.

In May of 1993 I moved to West Des Moines and worked full-time in Dave's dental office the next couple years. I still work part-time in his office and together we own a personal growth seminar business called Education for Living-Iowa, Inc.

Three and a half years ago we joined an exciting church, Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines. It is a congregation that is only six years old and that has a membership of over 2,000 and an average weekend attendance of 1,400. I have been active in the parish in a number of ways. The most rewarding way I am involved is that the lead pastor, Mike Housholder, considers me his pastor. I am honored and humbled by his respect and confidence in me.

I have suffered greatly about not being an ELCA pastor. I believe my skills for pastoral ministry are better than they have ever been. I long for the opportunity to serve as a pastor without the difficult internal struggle that was a part of my 19 years of ordained ministry.

I really did hope that the ELCA would change its policy and agree to accept gay and lesbian clergy who are in committed sexual relationships to serve as pastors. I don't believe that change will come quickly and I continue to age more quickly than I would like.

This past summer Dave and I began to discuss another possibility – the possibility of me living in compliance with the ELCA policy in order to be a pastor. The ELCA policy specifically says that clergy who are homosexual are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships. Though our relationship is a strong commitment for us we decided we are willing to give up the sexual aspect of our relationship for the sake of my call to ministry. We are saying that my call is more important to us than our sexual relationship. For the sake of my call to ministry we are willing to live in accord with the policy. We ask you to affirm my call to ministry by recognizing that living in a non-sexual, homosexual relationship we are in compliance with the policy of the church. Dave and I have been non-sexual since June 1999.

It may be difficult to find a call, but I suspect there are congregations in the ELCA who would welcome a gay pastor who is in compliance with the churches' rules. I ask you to give me the chance to find that church. I ask you to give me the opportunity to again fulfill the call from God that has been such a sacred and important part of my life since I was in eighth grade. I assure you that the call to ordained ministry is stronger and more important to me than it has ever been.

I hope this background information will be helpful to you. My purpose in writing this is the realization that there is a lot more that I want you to know about my background than I will be able to share in the interview on January 15<sup>th</sup>. I am looking forward to my conversation with the committee in January.

END

### **An essay Paul wrote a few months before applying for reinstatement as an ELCA pastor**

Paul A. Johnson

- former Assistant to the Bishop, La Crosse Area Synod, ELCA

- April 20, 1999

As a child of 13 I believed God was calling me to the ordained ministry of the Lutheran Church. At that time I didn't tell anyone about my "call," partly from fear that no one would take me seriously, but also because I doubted, denied, and resisted this inner "call." I planned my life in other directions. As a college sophomore I finally announced my intention to attend seminary and be ordained. I felt a new sense of peace within and with God.

I came to understand and accept the two-fold sense of "call" commonly accepted by Lutherans. The inner call needs to be recognized and affirmed by the church. I experienced that affirmation when I received a call to a small rural parish in Wisconsin and was ordained at my home church in Ladysmith, Wisconsin on June 4, 1972. I began what I knew would be a life-long commitment and career.

My marriage two years earlier was also a commitment I expected to last a lifetime. I sometimes felt "different" from other young men; however, I was not aware of my sexuality when I married and when I was ordained.

I am sorry for the pain my wife endured as a result of my growing awareness that I am gay. She and I separated and were divorced in 1991. She had known I was gay for seven years. I am pleased that I am the father of three wonderful children - now young adults. They are very accepting of their gay father and our relationship is strong and loving. My two daughters, my son, and my son-in-law are more gracious, more Christian, than the church proved to be.

Between 1972 and 1988 I served as the Pastor of three Wisconsin parishes: at Harrisville, Mindoro, and Viroqua. In June 1988, I was installed as the Assistant to the Bishop of the La Crosse Area

Synod, ELCA. I enjoyed my work in the Bishop's office even more than being a parish pastor. Bishop Stefan Guttormsson was appreciative and complimentary of my work.

I resigned as Assistant to the Bishop on May 22, 1991 in response to a request from Bishop Guttormsson. The alternative he offered was a disciplinary hearing. I didn't want to put my family through that.

The preceding week the Bishop told me he had been informed that I was gay. I had revealed my sexual orientation to a small group at an ELCA Congregational Social Ministry event in Chicago in February. At the conference there was an explicit expectation of confidentiality. We were encouraged to share our stories and our pain. I believed my confidence would be respected. When two members of my small group returned home they shared what they knew about me with their bishop. His concern for the "well-being of the church" led to letters from those two people to Bishop Guttormsson. Ironically they were promised their names and letters would be kept confidential from me. They were not reprimanded for their breach of confidence.

With encouragement from Bishop Chilstrom, Bishop Guttormsson issued a press release the day after my resignation. On May 24, 1991 the lead article in the La Crosse Tribune announced: "GAY PASTOR RESIGNS POST." The article included my picture. Only a few people knew I was gay until the church leaders chose to "out" me.

The church offered me no assistance with a career change. No effort was made to provide pastoral care for me or my family. The church I had faithfully served for nineteen years demonstrated judgement rather than compassion. A year later the Executive Committee of the Synod voted to remove my name from the clergy roster of the ELCA.

I am not in agreement with the ELCA guidelines regarding ordination of persons who are homosexual. For those of us who are gay the church requires a commitment to life-long celibacy. I am not willing to make such a commitment. I believe the church should affirm faithful, committed relationships for gay and lesbian people as it does for heterosexual people. I believe sexuality is a gift from God - homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. The "Visions and Expectations" document of the ELCA affirms that human sexuality is a gift from God, but makes it clear that there is no context for gay clergy to experience the fullness of that gift. Heterosexuality is affirmed as a gift. Homosexuality is treated as a curse.

I am not ashamed of who I am, but I am ashamed of my church. ELCA Churchwide assemblies in 1991 and 1993 declared "gay and lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." In spite of such action few congregations are openly welcoming of gay and lesbian people, our committed relationships are not affirmed (there is no policy regarding ELCA clergy officiating at commitment ceremonies), and gay and lesbian clergy continue to resign under pressure or are removed after a disciplinary hearing.

I now live in West Des Moines, Iowa. I have been in a committed relationship with a wonderful man since January 1992. I now fully understand the "one flesh" union spoken of in scripture. My partner and I believe God affirms and blesses us and our relationship just as God blesses other married couples.

I am currently working part-time in my partners dental office and we own a business together called Education for Living - Iowa, Inc. We do personal growth seminars which focus on listening skills, communication skills, relationship skills, and mood management.

For several years I didn't attend church much and when I did I found myself very uncomfortable. Just being there reminded me of what I had lost and my anger surfaced about the church being an unwelcoming place for gay and lesbian people. In June of 1996 my partner and I joined Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines. We have experienced the congregation as a welcoming place even though we have no idea about the opinion of a majority of members regarding gay and lesbian people. My faith in God remains strong.

I am currently a member of the Church and Lesbian and Gay Persons Ministry Team of the Southeastern Iowa Synod. The purpose of this ministry team is to create a climate whereby gay and lesbian persons will be welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of this synod.

I continue to hope that things will change in my church. I will welcome the opportunity to serve again as an ordained minister when this church is willing to affirm committed relationships for gay and lesbian people whether they are lay or clergy. God has not rescinded the "call" I first experienced when I was 13. I am no longer on the clergy roster; however, I consider myself an ordained Lutheran pastor. I wait for the time when the church will again welcome my gifts without asking me to deny my sexuality.

I am not alone. There may be as many as 2,000 homosexual clergy and more than a half million homosexual lay people in the 5.3 million member ELCA. (Though there may be more former Lutherans who are gay or lesbian than current members because we have not been welcome) This church treasures the notion of "inclusiveness." The ELCA is working toward a goal of ten percent minority membership. It has already reached that goal. It is likely that ten percent of us are gay or lesbian, but attitudes and oppression within society and the church keep us secret and hidden. There are people in every congregation and pastors in every synod who struggle and suffer because even though they are faithful Christians they are also gay or lesbian.

END

### **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Paul Johnson's Ordination:**

June 4, 2002

I woke up early today – at 4:00 a.m. I started thinking about what day it is today and I couldn't get back to sleep. Today should have been a happy day for me, a day for celebrating. Instead I find myself feeling a great sadness and struggling with an anger and bitterness I thought I had mostly given up.

Thirty years ago today I was ordained as a Lutheran minister in my home church in Ladysmith, Wisconsin. It was a wonderful day. It was the culmination of a journey that began when I was in eighth grade and first believed that God was calling me to ordained ministry.

I served three parishes. The first was in Harrisville, WI; the second in Mindoro, WI; and the third in Viroqua, WI. In 1988 I was called as the Assistant to the Bishop in La Crosse, WI. I resigned from that position on May 22, 1991. Bishop Guttormsson had been told I was gay. He demanded my resignation and I complied. He issued a press release and I was the front-page article in the La Crosse Tribune on May 24, 1991. It was a very difficult time for my wife and three children as well as myself. As of June 1, 1992, I was removed from the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

I was separated from my wife after my resignation and divorced shortly after that. I moved to Iowa in September of 1991. I have done various kinds of work since then. I am now a Shiatsu massage therapist and also work part-time in my partners dental office. I have been in a committed relationship with a wonderful man, David, for ten and a half years.

For a while after my resignation I looked for opportunities to fight for myself and for other gay and lesbian people in the church, especially those who are ordained. A few years ago I withdrew from the struggle. It is too costly for me emotionally to fight any longer. I support and encourage those who continue the struggle. I will celebrate the victories for gay and lesbian people when they come, but I don't have the energy to fight any more.

I decided a couple of years ago not to put myself in a position again where the church can say "no" to me again. I almost violated that resolve in March when my mother died at the age of 91. I wanted to take a leadership role in her funeral. I wanted to wear my alb and stole, a visible symbol of ordination. I wanted her funeral to be at Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wisconsin, where she had been a member for a great many years. My father was the contractor when the church building was built in the 50's. But to do her funeral there I needed to ask the senior pastor, Jeffrey Pedersen, for permission. I intended to do that, but he was out of town and unable to be reached until Friday evening, March 22, and we wanted to have the funeral on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. So we scheduled the funeral for the funeral home and I officiated at Mom's funeral. I think the pastor would have said "no" to my request and I am glad I didn't give him that option. Pastor Pedersen was back in town on Friday evening, but he didn't come to the visitation or the funeral. He didn't extend any expression of sympathy to my family or me. He simply avoided us. My mother was a member of that church for at least 60 years. I think his lack of support at the time of her death is a failure of his calling as a pastor. And I am sad about that.

So – I am sad on the anniversary of my ordination. Being a Lutheran pastor is the only thing I had wanted to do since eighth grade. I believe that God's call to me remains valid. She has not changed her mind about me, but the church has. I continue to think of myself as a Lutheran pastor and many other people join me in that. I continue to look for opportunities to be a pastor. I did that at my mother's funeral and recently at my nieces wedding. In September I will officiate at the wedding of my oldest daughter and her finace. I am pleased that I was able to be a pastor at two lesbian weddings last year and I will officiate at the wedding of a gay male couple in August. But I wanted to serve the church full-time until I retired and I am sad that the church has said "no."

I am sad today, not only for myself, but also for the 100's of people who have felt called by God to serve in the ordained ministry in the Lutheran church, but have not been and will not be ordained because they refuse to live by the unjust policy of the church that they remain celibate.

I am sad today for the gay and lesbian people who are ordained and serve the church faithfully, but must remain in the closet. I fear for those who struggle so deeply with the conflict between their calling and their nature that they are suicidal, as I was for eleven years.

I am glad that some bishops choose not to take action against gay and lesbian pastors who they know are in relationships. I have been told about two bishops who have homosexual assistants who are in relationships and they overlook the situation. But I am deeply saddened that bishops who tolerate or turn a blind eye to non-celibate gay clergy do not advocate for change in the church.

I'm sad that most of my gay and lesbian friends have left Christian churches because they have been unwelcome. My partner and I are still members of a Lutheran church, but we struggle constantly with whether we want to remain members. I'm sad that it should even be a question, but our welcome has always felt conditional and incomplete.

I am sad that church leaders mostly see this as a problem for gay and lesbian people. It is really the church's problem. Anytime the church alienates and excludes a large number of people it has a very big problem. I am sad that the church hasn't yet recognized that.



I am glad for the people in groups like the Extraordinary Candidacy Committee who look for calls for gay and lesbian people and boldly challenge the church. And sometimes I am sad that I don't have the energy to fight in that way for my call.

Thirty years ago today I was ordained as a Lutheran pastor. The church has said "no" to my ordination, but God has not. And I still think of myself as a Lutheran pastor. But there will be no celebration today, and I am very sad!  
END

**Essay by Paul Johnson's Younger daughter, 1993**  
**"Can't Judge a Book by its Cover"**

One Saturday afternoon we sat down to a family meeting. I had no idea what to expect. This was our first official family meeting and I was fifteen years old. I knew something was up. My father started out the meeting saying, "I have something important to tell you." He then proceeded to explain to us that he was homosexual. My sister, brother, and I were so shocked that we didn't know what to say and we started to cry. The crying was not because we were sad, but more so because we didn't know how to react. I sat thinking, "I have known this man for fifteen years and I had no idea." I wondered how people would react towards him and me. But then I realized people shouldn't react differently. NO ONE SHOULD JUDGE HOMOSEXUALS HARSHLY OR UNJUSTLY.

Dad didn't fit any of the "normal" stereotypes of a gay man. No one would have ever guessed my Dad to be homosexual. He didn't dress or act any differently than anyone else's father. He wore suits to church and jeans and sweatshirts around town. Dad always wanted to be a big part in our lives. He liked playing tennis with us and taking his family out to eat. He did all the same things any other father would do.

During the family meeting, I was thinking about how this was going to change my whole life. I knew it would change because now my parents were getting a divorce. How would other things change? I then realized things shouldn't and wouldn't change. Dad, the man I had known for fifteen years, was still the same person he had always been, the same man I loved and who loved me back. His homosexuality hadn't changed his personality and the fact that he was my father.

Dad was a well-respected man in the community. For seven years he was the pastor of a Lutheran church in town. He worked hard at his job and loved his work. He had always been a good man, helping people out with their problems and celebrating with them their joys. After being a pastor, he became the Assistant to the Bishop of the synod. In this job he had more responsibilities. He had to help churches in the synod select a new pastor when needed and do other things that the Bishop didn't get done. People looked up to him with great respect and admiration. One day the Bishop learned that Dad was homosexual. The Bishop then explained to my Dad that he either had to resign or he would be fired. Dad took the respectable way out and resigned. It was then that we sat down to the unforgettable family meeting. Dad knew it would be in the newspaper so he chose to reveal it to us before we read it in some newspaper.

Everybody thinks that homosexuality makes a person bad, but Dad still was the same good person he had always been in the preceding years. Dad always liked helping people work out their problems. One day a couple came to him wondering if they were really right for each other. They were engaged but they were struggling with this question. Dad counseled them and they decided that they were right for each other. They got married and are very happy with the decision. Dad still helps people out when he can. Homosexuality doesn't change the type of person you are or your values.

Another misconception about homosexuals is that they pick their sexual preference. All people are born with certain traits like eye color, hair color, dominant hand, and personality. People are also born

with their sexual preference. My Dad just didn't realize his sexual preference until later in life, or he denied it because of the way homosexuals are treated. Dad wouldn't have picked to be homosexual after nineteen years of marriage and three children. He isn't the type of person to want to break up a marriage because he chooses to be homosexual. Dad did not pick his sexual preference. He was simply born with it!

Homosexuality has not changed the way I look at my dad. I still love him with all my heart. He is still the same person he was before we sat down to that family meeting that day. Homosexuality doesn't change people, and people can't change their homosexuality.  
END

## **An Update from Paul Johnson** August 25, 2006

You have read my story from some things I wrote a few years ago. I want you to know what is happening in my life now.

In what you have read, I spoke positively about Lutheran church of Hope in West Des Moines, Iowa. Dave and I were members there for about 10 years. At first it felt like there was a lot of acceptance and I was welcome to do several things in the congregation including chairing an internship committee and teaching vacation Bible school.

As time went on I continued to offer to do things in the congregation, but often my offers were ignored or rejected. Pastor Mike seemed to have less time for me even though he had previously told many people that I was his pastor. As the congregation grew and more clergy were added to the staff it seemed to me that it was moving in a more conservative direction theologically and in regard to issues like the place of gay people in church and society.

Beginning in about 2002, Dave and I stopped attending regularly. In the spring of 2004 I discovered Pastor Mike, along with all the staff, the church council, and over 100 members, had signed onto something called the "Dorado Covenant." It was a conservative statement that included: "We teach and practice that a full sexual relationship belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a publicly committed legal marriage between one man and one woman." It was clear that this congregation and its pastors would never respect the relationship between Dave and myself as a moral and valid relationship. After some email exchanges about that with Pastor Mike we decided our time at this congregation was over.

A few months later we began attending Urbandale United Church of Christ. That fall the United Church of Christ began the "God is Still Speaking" advertising campaign. We discovered when they say "everyone is welcome" they really mean it. Urbandale UCC is a "Just Peace" and "Open and Affirming" congregation.

At Lutheran Church of Hope we were tolerated and accepted. At Urbandale United Church of Christ we are affirmed, respected, and admired. There are many gay and lesbian people and families in our congregation. Our Senior Pastor, Michael Pater, is in a committed relationship with another man. Our Associate Pastor, Emily Goldthwaite Fries, is straight and married. She has a special interest and knowledge regarding transgender people.

The ELCA removed me from the clergy roster, but at Urbandale UCC I am a Lutheran Pastor. This Sunday Pastor Emily will be installed and I will wear my vestments and process with all the other clergy.

My family has grown. My daughters are both married and the younger one lives in Green Bay. They have two children. So I am now a grandfather of a 5 year old granddaughter and a 2 year old grandson. My oldest daughter and her husband live in Eureka, California, and they are pregnant with twins. I am expecting two more grandchildren next February or March. My son lives in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The relationship Dave and I have with all of them is very positive. Dave has two sons. The oldest is also gay and lives here in Des Moines, Iowa, with his partner. His younger son is a physician in Saginaw, Michigan. He and his wife have two sons and a daughter. We are looking forward to celebrating the high school graduation of Dave's oldest grandson next May.

When I resigned from my position as Assistant to the Bishop in La Crosse I expected to someday serve as an ELCA pastor again. I thought that surely the church would change its position within ten years. Now it has been fifteen years and nothing has changed. While I continue to hope for change I no longer expect it in my lifetime. (I will be 60 in October)

I will never be an ELCA pastor again. It is possible that I may decide to serve in a position as a pastor again, but if I do it will be as a United Church of Christ pastor.

For now my primary work is as a massage therapist and I also lead personal growth seminars. In the context of my work and my membership in a wonderful Christian congregation I continue to fulfill my pastoral calling in spite of the ELCA and the spiritual violence it continues to inflict on LGBT folks.

I am sad that the ELCA has once again chosen to expend its energy and financial resources on a trial of another pastor, Brad Schmeling. Once again it sends a clear message that only straight people are fully welcome in the ELCA. This surely is NOT the work God is calling the church to do!

END

## 6. Conclusion

Paul Johnson's story is dramatic, but it is not unique. Hundreds of pastors have been silently or publicly removed from the ELCA roster for pastoring while gay.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has discussed human sexuality time and time again since its inception in 1998. Until policy changes, pastors will continue to be victimized not for any fault of ministry, but simply for loving a partner of their same gender.

**Please help others discover Paul Johnson's story.**

1. You can print this PDF and post it at church.
2. You can email this PDF to churches and church members.
3. You can direct visitors to this article  
on the Internet at [www.straightintogayamerica.com/pauljohnson](http://www.straightintogayamerica.com/pauljohnson)

**Resources to help the ELCA achieve LGBT Equality.**

**goodsoil:** ([www.goodsoil.org](http://www.goodsoil.org))

**About:** goodsoil.org is the official website of the collaboration to overcome the policy and practice of discrimination within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) against LGBT clergy, same-sex marriages and covenanted relationships. Read the goodsoil platform regarding ordination, marriage, and bisexual and transgender inclusion.

**Lutherans Concerned North America (LCNA)** ([www.lcna.org](http://www.lcna.org))

**Mission:** The ministries of Lutherans Concerned / North America (LC/NA) embody, inspire, and support the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, their families, friends and allies, within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners.

Through our Reconciling in Christ Program, ministries, resources, events and alliances, LC/NA: builds community for worship, education and support; fosters welcome and acceptance in all Lutheran settings; advocates for the ecclesial changes necessary to ensure full participation in all rites, sacraments, and ministries of the Church; and invites all people into Gospel lives of authenticity, integrity and wholeness.

**Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM)** ([www.llgm.org](http://www.llgm.org))

**What We Do:** LLGM provides financial, pastoral, and legal support to sexual minority pastors and to the congregations that support them. In addition we encourage congregations to consider calling sexual minority clergy by serving as a placement vehicle for pastors approved by the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP). LLGM has provided assistance to scores of Lutheran pastors, often after their congregations, colleagues and bishops have deserted them. Annually, LLGM provides financial support to congregations who call our pastors.

**The Extraordinary Candidacy Process (ECP):** ([www.extraordinarycandidacyproject.org](http://www.extraordinarycandidacyproject.org))

**About:** The Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) was formed in 1993 to promote the full participation of sexual minority persons in the professional life of the Lutheran church. We actively resist the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's exclusionary practices and discriminatory policies toward sexual minority pastors and candidates for ministry. We exist as a hopeful alternative and model for preparing candidates and certifying the credentials of sexual minority persons who are seeking to have their vocations affirmed and their committed relationships honored.

**Wingspan Ministries:** ([www.stpaulref.org/wingspan.htm](http://www.stpaulref.org/wingspan.htm))

**Description:** Wingspan Ministry is a ministry of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church. Wingspan is a ministry of pastoral care, education, advocacy and support for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

**Lutheran Network for Inclusive Vision (The Network):** (<http://www.inclusivenet.com/>)

**Description:** a public roster of church leaders committed to witness to the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ by fostering full inclusion of sexual minority people in the congregational life and ordained ministry of the ELCA. The Network encourages ELCA clergy, AIMS, and church members to challenge the policies and practices which continue to bring so much pain to lgbt members of our church and their families, and deprive the church of gifted professionals.

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