

# Augustana: Faith and Reason Intertwined

Mark Hurty, July 13, 2009

In August 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will consider adopting two related statements that will reflect the Church's official position on the ordination of homosexual men and women as pastors. The ELCA has been grappling with this issue for most of the past 20 years, almost since the denominational body came into existence through the merger of several predecessor Lutheran denominations. Those predecessors were, in turn, products of previous mergers. It is one of those earlier expressions of Lutheranism, the Augustana Synod, that I will argue fostered the values that are the foundation of the movement to embrace the ideal of welcoming gay men and lesbian women into the clergy.

The American political landscape is littered with the detritus of the debate on homosexuality, with a particular emphasis on a narrow definition of marriage. The ELCA's exploration of human sexuality is an attempt by a mainline protestant institution to grapple with that problem without resorting to biblical literalism and fear. While fundamentalist denominations have sponsored "defense of marriage" acts, narrowly defining legal definitions of marriage by their own narrow theological understanding of marriage as a union of one man and one woman, the ELCA has taken a different path, and chosen to ponder the question of homosexuality (and human sexuality in general) in a way that relies on both faith and reason. In this paper I will lay out a historical precedent for this journey as it has been undertaken by the ELCA by looking at the theological and academic traditions of the Augustana Synod. I will suggest that faith and reason are intertwined in the Augustana heritage, and that this felicitous entanglement could be at the core of a

positive answer to the questions on human sexuality with which the the ELCA is currently grappling. I will reflect on a tendency towards socially progressive attitudes within the ELCA that has roots in the social justice ideals that were evident in the faculty of the Augustana Theological Seminary in the 1930s. In general, I will share a view of how Augustana traditions, theology, and ecumenical ideals continue to have influence in the ELCA today and how that influence differentiates the ELCA from other denominations, particularly those denominations that favor a fundamentalist theology.

This journey of understanding is, for me, a family heritage exploration. I did not come to a conclusion about the Augustana Synod's value system merely by intuition or observation, but by descent. I am a product of this church. Its values and perspectives were embedded within me by my parents, grandparents and extended family and friends. And, while my sense about the evolution of the church in which I was raised is shaped by personal perspective, I am indebted to several scholars who have helped me achieve some objectivity about my experience, and about the church. These scholars (including Maria Erling, Arland Hultgren, and Gerald Christianson) helped me put my heritage into context within the broader expression of Lutheranism. They helped me grapple with the "why" of my own beliefs and values. The material I read (and conversations in which I engaged) in preparing this paper, helped me frame my beliefs in a context that is historically sensitive, and illuminates how my family's historical piety nurtured our socially progressive values.

In the branches of my family tree are nine Swedish-American-Lutheran pastors. My mother's grandfathers were Lutheran pastors of the Augustana Synod, a denominational body formed by Swedish immigrants to the United States in 1860. Her maternal grandfather, Rev. Frans O.W.

Gustafson, served congregations in Colorado, and her paternal grandfather, Rev. Aaron S. Segerhammar, served congregations in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. While none of the Gustafson children became clergy themselves, two of Fran's and Blanche's daughters married pastors of the Augustana Synod. One daughter, Ruth, married Aaron and Sigrid Segerhammar's son Carl, and it is from them that I am descended, and by whom I was particularly well influenced. Carl and Ruth's two youngest children, my uncle Kemp and aunt Karen, were ordained as Lutheran pastors. Kemp and Karen's older twin sisters married a pair of graduates of Augustana Seminary. Kathryn (my mom's twin) married Byron Swanson. My mother, Kathleen, and father, David, were married shortly after my dad's ordination into the Augustana Synod. My dad's older brother Robert Hurty also was an Augustana pastor.

The rituals of my upbringing in the church were decidedly influenced by the ideals of the Augustana Synod. Though I was only five years old at the time of the merger between the Augustana Synod and those denominations that became the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), a body that was subsequently merged into the ELCA, the influence of that Augustana heritage was never extinguished. My parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles continued to imbue our lives and family traditions with those values that were core to the Augustana expression. The hymns and liturgical settings continue to be familiar. A strong and strict sense of piety was blended with a firm belief in the unconditional love of God. As Arland Hultgren, professor and Greek Testament scholar at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, explained to me, "there was a strong inward piety in the people of Augustana." That piety, observed Hultgren, was balanced by "knowing one's self to be loved by God, in spite of one's own brokenness." Hultgren's observations mirror my own family experience. The evident piety of my grandparents Carl and Ruth was

indeed tempered by an equally evident unconditional love that was modeled on what they readily told us was the unconditional love they felt in the presence of God.

As important to my grandparents as the church services we attended on Sundays were family gatherings and meals. No meal in my grandparents' home was served without prayer, no one was excused from the table before the hymns were sung and devotions shared. Even after the dishes were cleared, there were often discussions that would expand on some issue that needed further attention. Those discussions that did not relate to a sermon topic or other religious theme might be centered on education.

Education was the other value in our home that was esteemed as highly as our religious experience. Those adults in the family who were not ordained pastors were teachers. This core family value paralleled the values of the Augustana Synod. The church built four four-year colleges to provide a sound education for the youth of the church. A seminary was committed to education and training of pastors for the synod's congregations. These were not merely Bible schools erected for the purpose of indoctrinating young people in the dogma of the faith. They were liberal arts institutions with curricula modeled on the Swedish universities at Lund and Uppsala, where several of the early leaders of the Augustana Synod had studied. This tradition of education was a cultural feature, rooted in the Augustana Synod's Swedish heritage, which grew to be an influential aspect of the Augustana Synod's theological stance.

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If faith and reason are to be intertwined, institutions of learning must put these two important ideals in dialogue. The leaders of the Augustana Synod placed a high value on the education of its members, and this value went beyond the idea that church members be well versed in the

church's theology. It was essential that the people of the Augustana Synod be educated in the liberal arts. Eschewing a strictly parochial model, professors encouraged students to think critically and express themselves openly. Writing as a senior in the January 1915 edition of the Augustana College *Observer*, Conrad Bergendoff (who would serve as president of Augustana College and Seminary from 1935 to 1948) expressed an exceptionally nuanced and informed view of Karl Marx's writings on Socialism. Bergendoff noted that the theory of Socialism shared some basic values with Christianity: "Two forces ... are now in the field working to accomplish this fraternalizing of mankind ... Socialism and Christianity compare and agree in two things: 1) they are both social, seeking a reorganization of society; 2) they are both democratic, aiming at such a reorganization as shall give a greater diffusion of virtue, intelligence and power." He goes on to note a couple of ways in which Christianity and Socialism differ, but then offers, "Christianity strives to better the condition of man's nature, Socialism to better man's conditions."

His observation that Christianity and Socialism shared a common goal of creating a society less defined by individualism and more by brotherhood is possibly a little unconventional for a college student at that time, but not entirely surprising. What is more surprising is that a college student in the United States would produce such a nuanced observation on the theories of a German philosopher and revolutionary political theorist whose work had not yet triggered the Russian revolution. That Marx's theories were being read, discussed and critiqued by undergraduates of a church-affiliated college in the American midwest is evidence of an educational philosophy that embraced the uninhibited exploration of knowledge and reason. This wide ranging exploration was not limited to the study of science and biology, but of philosophy, economics, and politics.

Conrad Bergendoff is an appealing example of the expression of Augustana Lutheranism. He was at once a child of the synod (his father was one of the first immigrants from Sweden to become a pastor in the church), and he became one of her most admired leaders. As the President of Augustana College and Seminary he was instrumental in the expansion of the curriculum of both institutions. He was a singular example of the unique flavor of pietism that came to symbolize the Augustana Church. And he was an enthusiastic crusader for ecumenism. It's the combination of pietism and ecumenism that gave Augustana its unique character.

As my uncle, Byron Swanson, observed in his dissertation (written in the late 1960s in support of a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary), it was the pietism of the Augustana Church, rather than scholastic orthodoxy that was deeply influential on young Bergendoff. Augustana pietism, says Swanson, "... was not so much concerned with being right in doctrine as in being right with God." And this pietism was irenic, distinguishing it from the isolationist form of pietism that is more familiar in fundamentalist expressions of the church. (Swanson, 94) This was a form of pietism that led to a humble but confident relationship with God—a pietism that demonstrated deeply felt gratitude for God's grace.

Parenthetically, it should not come as a surprise that this irenic pietism gave birth to a form of ecumenism that still flourishes today on the campuses of the Augustana Synod colleges (now folded into the body of colleges affiliated with the ELCA). At Augustana College's baccalaureate service preceding our younger son Nate's graduation in 2009, students read from the scriptures of the three Abrahamic faiths. A Jewish student read from the Hebrew Testament, a Christian student read from the Greek Testament, and a Muslim student read from the Holy Koran. This ecumenical expression is distinctive of the Augustana heritage, and marks a willingness to look

beyond the wisdom of our own faith to the broader wisdom of other religious expressions. We maintain our own identity, but we are willing to engage in open dialogue with our brothers and sisters of many faiths.

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While the faith of the Augustana Church was centered in a humble expression of pietism, it was also true that members of the church and professors at her colleges and seminary were committed to the values of reason and logic. Scientific study and exploration were part of the educational culture of Augustana schools from the beginning. Augustana College's science department boasted a museum of natural history that had been started in the late 1800s. The first curator of that museum, Joshua Lindahl, Augustana's professor of science (and a prominent zoologist), traveled to the West Coast in the late 1870s on a collecting expedition to the Farallon Islands off the coast of California near San Francisco. Lindahl's description, "...interesting forms of life in and around these isolated rocks in the Pacific Ocean," (Fryxell, 14) recalled the famous journey of another naturalist several decades earlier—the collecting expedition of Charles Darwin on the Galapagos Islands, also in the Pacific Ocean.

Darwin's theory of evolution had come as an exclamation point on the vast expansion of scientific knowledge during the 17th and 18th centuries. Discoveries about electricity, and a better understanding of chemistry, biology, and physics were rapidly transforming our perception of the world as a place of mystery to a place that followed certain physical rules. Scientific knowledge was growing at a rate that was made possible partly by the technological advancement of the industrial revolution. As Steven Johnson notes in his book *The Invention of Air*, "This is a standard pattern in the history of science: when tools for measuring increase their precision by orders of

magnitude, new paradigms often emerge, because the newfound accuracy reveals anomalies that had gone undetected.”

The educational wing of the Augustana Synod — her seminary and colleges (Augustana College and Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, Bethany in Lindsborg, Kansas; Gustavus Adolphus in St. Peter, Minnesota; Upsala in East Orange, New Jersey) began, in the years following the Scopes Trial, to view science as a meaningful and complementary study with respect to the study of theology. Kai Swanson, the assistant to the current president of Augustana College, and himself the son of an Augustana pastor (the late Rev. Richard Swanson) shared something with me in a phone conversation which he says he has shared often in his years at Augustana. He recalls a conversation between Conrad Bergendoff and Fritiof Fryxell, a renowned geologist who taught at Augustana, during which Bergendoff told Fryxell that (Kai admits to paraphrasing here) “if we believe in a creator, we must dive into a study of all creation — without blinking.” Like the technological advancement that led to new discoveries in the exploration of the physical world, Darwin’s discoveries led to further exploration of the mystery surrounding the development of human life, and required a new paradigm of understanding and exploration. Charged with the responsibility of educating the young people of the Augustana Synod, Bergendoff and Fryxell knew that they had a responsibility to put faith into dialogue with reason and science. Failure to do this could be catastrophic for both faith and reason.

This commitment to pursue the study of science wherever it might lead was crucial to the evolution of the theology of the Augustana Synod (as it has been for other mainline protestant denominations). This willingness to embrace the science of evolution required a new perspective and different way of understanding the stories of the Bible. Rather than binding themselves to a



literal reading of the scriptures, theologians sought to put the Bible in a historical context that would lead to a much richer and deeper understanding of our relationship with God. By unbinding their theology from the Bible as merely a strict set of rules or hardened doctrine, the scholars of the church were able to put their faith to work in helping them to come to a clearer understanding of how the Bible is a literary and historical expression of God's unconditional love, meant to propel us to action in love for one another. This 'action' found its footing in the social justice movements of the early part of the 20th century. A. D. Mattson, professor of Christian ethics, admonished students at Augustana Seminary to take seriously their calling to be advocates for the disadvantaged people of society, and to fight against discrimination and exploitation. "He was in the forefront in the struggle for civil rights, workers' rights, and social justice and he devoted his life on earth to working with and for the downtrodden." (D. Hurty)

As Stephen Johnson observed in *The Invention of Air*, scientific discovery was predicated on technological advances that made it possible to observe and appreciate previously unknown phenomena in tangible ways. The invention of precise scales and of the microscope and telescope led to the discovery of things unknown, unanticipated and possibly unappreciated by previous generations. With these tools, we were able to see the world more closely, able to come into contact with smaller organisms and observe the previously unobserved. With this new, close-up view, we needed to develop a better and more sophisticated way of understanding the natural world. Science gave us a vocabulary and methodology for grappling with this new knowledge. Darwin's discovery of the process of evolution was made possible by some of these technological advances. Public acceptance of his theory relied on the emergence of a cultural appreciation for scientific endeavor. This leap-frogging style of advancement continues today as we now have

the technology to look closely at DNA and are able to peer into the mystery of our genetic make-up. In the past 400 years we have developed a canon of scientific understanding and knowledge that surpasses the wildest imaginations of the writers who first conceived and transmitted the story of our creation as fully formed humans, molded from dust and given life by the breath of God in the story of Genesis. Those stories reflect the best attempt to explain creation at the time, given the absence of any scientific perspective. And those stories are still relevant today as expressions of faith because they mark the beginning of a certain kind of monotheistic tradition that survives today in many forms. The big theological problem, though, comes from trying to coerce our minds into believing that these creation stories are literally true.

The theology proposed in a literal fundamentalist reading of the Bible is insufficient in a modern world as a means of understanding our relationship with God. As early as the 1920s, the educators in the colleges of the Augustana Synod understood that a theological perspective that refused to acknowledge the burgeoning realm of scientific discovery would become an isolated, irrelevant perspective. These educators believed that what was needed was a perspective in which faith was not an enemy of reason, but a perspective in which faith could be informed by reason. In his lecture on evolutionary theory, Joshua Edquist, professor of biology and geology at Gustavus Adolphus College from 1887 to 1926, lectured his students by quoting historian John Fiske: "The doctrine of evolution destroys the conception of this world as a machine. It makes God our constant refuge and support, and nature His true revelation; and when all its religious implications shall have been set forth, it will be seen to be the most potent ally that Christianity has ever had in elevating mankind." (Erling, 220-221) Edquist's position was echoed by geologist Fritiof Fryxell at Augustana College, and while these men were on the front lines of the de-

bate about how the church should embrace the rapidly advancing scientific perspective, their efforts did not go unchallenged within the Augustana church. The great surprise (for me) was in learning the identity of one of those in the Augustana tradition who felt that a fundamental understanding of the bible, not a perspective influenced by reason, was critical to faithful observance of the principles of Lutheranism. That man was my great-grandfather, Aaron Segerhammar.

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While family connections have been crucial in my development as a person committed to social justice, the principles on which that commitment is based are not necessarily static over time, with regard to all the previous members of my family. My great grandfather, Aaron Segerhammar was among those who argued passionately against the idea of allowing our faith to be informed by scientific reason. In a 1928 document titled “Are Modern Pursuits of Knowledge Dangerous to Loyal Lutheranism?” Aaron argued that “The Church of Jesus Christ is the bulwark and repository of truth...and freedom of opinion and individual interpretation may not take upon itself the authority to change our doctrines and teachings.” (Erling, 221)

The socially progressive stance of the ELCA has its foundations in the Augustana Synod, but those foundations were not fully in place during the early years of the Augustana Church. It wasn't until the 1930s (in the decades following the Scopes Trial) that the Augustana Synod found itself grappling with a cultural context that was no longer easily reconciled with a simplistic literal reading of the Bible. The transformation was significant and, perhaps, unique. “The Augustana Synod's role in building a bridge to genuine modernity that was both historically re-

spectable and genuinely Lutheran owed much to a generation of scholars that began in the early 1930s at Augustana Theological Seminary.” (Christianson, 1)

While my great grandfather’s position came initially as a shock, it serves as a useful beginning marker for the transformation within the Augustana Synod and within our family. Exemplary of the evolution of the Church herself is the fact that my grandparents, parents and I (and many of my generation) became fully convinced of the value of allowing for individual interpretation. We believed in the value of living with faith informed by reason. My great grandfather represented those who clung to a conventional, orthodox view of theology as the single source of all inspired thought. His son, Carl W. Segerhammar, my grandfather (known to his friends as “Seger”), took a broader view and taught us that God gave us a brain for the purpose of thinking and reasoning, and that to mistrust reason was to miss the bigger purpose in our relationship with God. That relationship was something that I believe he came to understand through his study at Augustana Seminary in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Seger used to say (often in sermons, but nearly as often during dinner table conversations when the theological debate became esoteric) that “we are not called to be God’s debaters, we are called to be God’s witnesses,” by which he meant that our response to God’s unconditional love is not to use our relationship with God as a cudgel, or to sit in judgement of those who have a different opinion. We are called to be witnesses, to be demonstrative of the love of God which had been given to us unconditionally. Reason was crucial to our development as intelligent human beings. Paradoxically, God’s love, according to Seger, was ‘unreasonable’—it was given unconditionally, even to the sinner. God’s love couldn’t be proven in a debate. It required expression through our care, concern, and love for one another, regardless of any reasonable or rational justification. Further, human reasoning, rational

exploration of science, the ideas of Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, or Stephen Hawking offered no threat to our faith, because faith is not based on rational or reasoned understanding. Our faith is based on grace and an understanding of how God calls us to love one another.

Seeger graduated from Augustana Theological Seminary in 1932. His father, Aaron, graduated from the same seminary in 1900. Their differences with respect to their appreciation of reason are a reflection of the different approach to the teaching within the seminary as it evolved over those 32 years. In particular, there was a thorough revamping of the faculty of the seminary in 1930 and 1931, precipitated partially by the dissatisfaction of the student body with at least some of the older faculty members. When the seminary dean died, the board replaced him with Conrad Bergendoff. At the urging of a couple of activist board members, Bergendoff sought to build a faculty with a richer academic pedigree than the previous faculty, initiating the seminary's evolution into a more scholarly institution. A tendency for conservative theology prone to reading the Bible as an inerrant and infallible text began to give way to a more scholarly, historical-critical approach to the study of the Bible. This fostered progressive views of the church's role in society. At the forefront of this new approach was the seminary's new ethics professor, A. D. Mattson. (Erling)

It was clear that Seeger was exposed to a course of study that had evolved to be very different than the curriculum in use when his father was a student. "Your grandfather was there right when the big changes were taking place," said Gerald Christianson, Professor Emeritus of Church History at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Christianson, like his Gettysburg colleague Maria Erling, marks these big changes as simultaneous with the arrival of A. D. Mattson. When my father, Rev. David Hurty, speaks of Professor Mattson it is with the deepest of respect and

admiration. “He took seriously the biblical teaching that we are our brother's keeper. I remember, also, that as a person of integrity he was often called upon to serve as a negotiator in labor disputes. In many ways he was the ‘teaching conscience’ for the Augustana Lutheran Church and Seminary.” (D. Hurty)

Rev. David Baker, the current executive director of the Augustana Heritage Association and former Assistant to the Bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA, shares my father’s respect for Mattson. “I would cite the influence of A. D. Mattson and Eric Wahlstrom, professors at Augustana Seminary, on my growth in understanding both the world and the society in which we live and in which we are called to minister ... what I learned from my own Augustana heritage is that God's love is universal and without condition, that he has created each of us in his own image (including gay/lesbian and transgendered people), that he has endowed us all with unique gifts, and that he expects us to use those gifts for ministry to others wherever we may be within the world, [both] inside and outside the church.”

It’s clear that Mattson had a great influence within the Augustana synod generally, and with the seminary graduates who would become church leaders. Such was the case with Arland Hultgren at Luther Seminary. In my e-mail exchange with Arland he remembered Mattson fondly, and pondered what the elder professor’s opinion might have been on the questions of human sexuality currently before the ELCA. While he could not speculate on Mattson’s precise position, Hultgren himself provides a tantalizing clue as to what Mattson may have believed. The seeds of progressive thought and passion for human rights that Mattson sewed in Hultgren may explain the younger professor’s progressive stance and active role in the conversation on human sexuali-

ty in which we are engaged today. Hultgren is quick to point to the work others have done to raise our consciousness about this subject:

“I do think there is a trajectory, however dimly visible, that would have projected a progressive stance ... on the issues of our day. I say that, first of all, because of the strong sense in Augustana's leadership that the church and its members should respect human dignity and the worth of all people in the sight of God. ... my sense of things is also borne out by the large number of ELCA clergy of Augustana background who have taken a progressive stance. Herb Chilstrom comes to mind immediately, as do some other (retired) bishops, such as ... Harold Skillrud (Atlanta), Dale Skogman (Upper Michigan), and Roger Anderson (CA). There are more.”

Hultgren modestly refers to his own contributions, “I have written a good deal (including a good portion of the background study for the ELCA Task Force on interpreting the biblical texts), have served on a task force on homosexuality for the Saint Paul Area Synod, making presentations in congregations and at the South Dakota Synod assembly a few years ago, taking the progressive position. Lots of other persons could be mentioned.”

In these commitments to the exploration of this question, we see a direct through-line from the ideals passed to Hultgren from A.D. Mattson. Even if Mattson never directly pondered the question of human sexuality, his legacy and influence would certainly find expression in men like Arland Hultgren, Herb Chilstrom and the other bishops mentioned above. (Chilstrom was the first Presiding Bishop of the ELCA.) Mattson's legacy and values find full expression in the lives of Arland Hultgren, David Hurty, David Baker, and, I'm certain, many other former Augustana Pastors.

Picking up on Hultgren's observations, Maria Erling also points to the influence of Herb Chilstrom. In our e-mail conversation about the issues facing the ELCA, she noted that there is a thriving sense of community amongst the former members of the Augustana Synod. This deep connection is built upon the common experiences they shared in colleges and seminary, at gatherings of Augustana youth (Luther League) and in their regular annual synodical meetings. Former Augustana members, Erling says, "draw on significant social and formal ties that [bind] them in strong relationships of trust."

"One reason I think that many Augustana people may be supportive of social ministry efforts, and work to open the church's leadership to all people, and supportive of gay marriage, maybe because of the esteem people have for Herb Chilstrom, who has been a courageous leader on this issue. I think more in terms of these relational ties than of any underlying theology, or ethical stance, although theological issues, especially neo-orthodoxy, and some milder forms of the social gospel, were very influential in pulling the synod away from its moralism."

Erling further echoes Hultgren, clarifying my understanding of what it meant to be pious in the context of the Augustana Synod:

"Pietism — it has many forms, not all self righteous — is also alive and well within the Augustana heritage group. There are conservatives, also, who probably were more from rural parts of the church, and not as swayed by the professionally styled leadership that emerged after WWII and pushed for all the mergers. So, the Augustana spirit is not monolithic, but, I'd say that Augustana's stance toward the world has been quite influential in the ELCA debates, so far, for the most part because no one has wondered about



Augustana's loyalty to the church. This is not a group of people who would go their separate way.”

As I mentioned at the outset, this journey of exploration has been deeply personal. I have struggled for years to reconcile my personal understanding of what it means to be faithful in a religious context with my progressive opinions about human sexuality. I am a heterosexual man in a loving, committed marriage. I am a member of a mainline protestant church that has had a rather uncomfortable relationship with gay people, and I have dozens of close, personal and loving friends who are gay. I have always hoped and believed that my church would come to understand that there is no good reason to exclude gay people from a full and equal expression of their relationship with God.

What I learned during my conversations and reading in preparation for this project is that there is a legacy, of which I am a living expression, and upon which my understanding is built: As a child of the Augustana Synod I am connected by my relationships and family to a culture of pietistic believers, aware of the undeserved yet unconditionally given love of God. As a child of this Church I am emboldened by that love to act with love towards my brothers and sisters. This is not a unique expression of religious belief, but it is authentically forged by my rich Augustana heritage — a heritage committed to the ideals of Christian love.

So what does this mean for the ELCA as it ponders the future of its relationship with gay and lesbian children of God? Scholars with far greater insight than me cling to the hope that the legacy of our Augustana heritage (and the heritage of those who come from similar backgrounds who will join us) will propel us to seek a just and loving relationship with all of God’s children. The legacy of the Augustana Synod, and her colleges and seminary, point to a way of seeing how the

church can evolve with confidence and humility to embrace our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and bring them into full communion with a loving God. Of course, not all former members of the Augustana church share a single opinion about how to answer the questions before the ELCA. When we disagree, though, we have an example by which to proceed. It's the model of reconciliation that kept the Augustana Synod from splintering over its own internal struggles over the decades, rooted in a tradition of humble pietism as opposed to strict, scholarly orthodoxy.

Going back to what Maria Erling said about trust:

“I think about this high trust level when I consider your question about an Augustana approach to social issues. It has been the intent of the organizers of the Augustana Heritage to strengthen the ELCA along the lines of leadership and accountability that had made the synod so strong. But there are other cultural Lutheran legacies that pull in other directions — i.e. strong congregationalism, hyper-confessionalism, or even fundamentalist biblicism, as well as American social realities today — the denigration of denominational consciousness, the ‘me first’ localism, the self absorption of charismatic leaders, that fragment the efforts of Augustana's old style institutional developers. New models of gaining influence and trust are needed in our church today.”

I have faith that people who share an Augustana heritage — centered on faith, pious yet humble, intertwined with reason, and wrapped in the unconditional love of God — will provide an infectious influence within the debate. I hope this influence draws us together as Lutherans, and guides us to make principled decisions on the resolutions before the assembly of the ELCA. The tradition and influence of our Augustana predecessors — Conrad Bergendoff, A. D. Mattson,

Herb Chilstrom, Joshua Edquist, Fritiof Fryxell, and others — will guide us. The model of gaining influence and trust is before us, and if we are of the Augustana heritage, it is within us. As our church ponders the questions of human sexuality, I have faith that we will rely on our heritage of intertwined faith and reason, and that we will reject the kind of fearful fundamentalism that leads to the devaluation of some of God's children.

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