

May 11, 2011

Dear Los Ranchos Pastors and Session Clerks,

Warmest greetings in the Risen Christ. I thank God for you every time I think of you.

Yesterday evening marked the approval of Amendment 10-A, the change in language for ordination standards proposed by the General Assembly in July, 2010. The attached FAQ sheet from our Presbytery Council and Stated Clerk offers more detailed explanation about the change and what it means. In brief, this amendment changes how Presbyterians will make judgments about who is to be ordained. It allows but does not require the ordination of sexually active gay and lesbian members. It takes the responsibility for that judgment out of the *Book of Order* and it requires the ordaining body to make judgments about ordination according to its interpretation of Scripture and the confessions. This will change things across the land.

As my first response, *I extend a warm and vigorous invitation to you* to come to the first of various opportunities we will have to explore together as Los Ranchos Presbytery what all this means for us and what our future will look like. The first two gatherings will be at Trinity United Presbyterian Church in Santa Ana, our generous host for regular presbytery gatherings:

for Los Ranchos Pastors: Wed., May 25, 11:30 am to 1:30 pm.
for All Interested Los Ranchos Leaders: Sat., June 4, 9 am to 11 am.

I share this invitation first because I want us to be together, to pray and listen together, to reason together. We really do need each other. Here are some reflections on why I feel this need so strongly.

That Amendment 10-A passed this year is a surprise to everyone I know who has followed this issue over the years. It elicits strong feelings among Presbyterians across the denomination and here within our own presbytery. Some are sad and angered, some are pleased and grateful - sometimes within the same congregation. Some expect this to drive people away, some expect this to attract new members. Some do not want this conflict to distract them from their mission. Some are exploring ways to realign themselves within the denomination. Others are determined to stay the course and are not dismayed. I have listened to one pastor wonder out loud about elders who wants to leave the denomination.

Whatever we do, and however we do it, we will do it TOGETHER. For all of the decisions that lie ahead, we need each other. And I could not be more encouraged about our prospects for moving ahead together in our particular presbytery. I've been doing a lot of listening. I have listened to you who are grieved by 10-A who are committed to struggle to stay together. I have listened

to you who are pleased by 10-A who are affectionately concerned about the distress that others are feeling.

One thing that always gets my attention is to see how much those on different sides of the issue have misconceptions of each other. There are misplaced worries about “those others” and what they must be intending. What I see more than anything, however, is caring people who are all shook up. Things are changing, and it all feels very unsettling.

I can't think of anything more important than our spending time together to share and listen to one another's hopes and fears that drive our imaginations. I want us to harness our imaginations for good in God's mission. I dread watching our imagination spent unnecessarily on unfounded worry. So let's talk and let's listen to each other. Please come to one of these first two meetings.

As I have read the daily lectionary's Scripture lessons this week, I have been struck the relentless message of 1 John: “Beloved, love one another.” In word and in deed, by loving one another we bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Darrell Guder wrote: “The way we change is itself a form of witness, which is often forgotten in the divisive and hurtful battles that go on inside local congregations.” It's also true for our presbytery.

For the past two months I have been in regular contact and daily prayer for 9 other EP friends across the country. We met in Houston in March and have since shared prayers and ideas for how to love and serve our presbyteries. From coordinating responses to strategies for helping the press get the story straight, we have shared it all. These EPS are each outstanding and each very different. And our presbyteries are as different as can be. What might be good news in one is not so good in another. Hearing their stories makes me so thankful for the relationships and friendships we enjoy here in Los Ranchos.

We really do need each other. We have decisions to make. How will we handle ordination examinations? How might we creatively realign things in a way that serves God's mission and honors Christ? What do we do when someone feels they cannot stay? Whatever we decide, ***we must decide together!*** We really do need each other, and I thank God that we have each other. Yesterday's lectionary lesson began: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” *1 John 4:7* I join you in prayer as I know we are all praying for our church. I look forward to seeing you pastors on May 25 and everyone else on June 4.

Warmly in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Steven Toshio Yamaguchi
Presbytery Pastor / Executive Presbyter
The Presbytery of Los Ranchos