



P R E S S R E L E A S E

EMBARGOED UNTIL

January 19, 2008, 2 p.m. (CST)

Contact:

Rev. Jen Nagel
612-872-4650

Rev. Erik Christensen (ELM Co-Chair)
773-235-5420

Lois Voss (ELM Co-Chair)
612-599-5941

Minneapolis Congregation Celebrates 'Extraordinary Ordination'

(Minneapolis, MN)

On January 19 in an "Extraordinary Ordination," the Rev. Jennifer Nagel was ordained and installed as the Pastor of Salem English Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. The service is called "extraordinary" because it takes place outside the ordinary guidelines for Lutheran ordinations, which ban non-celibate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from serving as pastors.

Salem Lutheran was one of the first congregations west of Chicago to worship in English; on Sunday November 11 it also became one of the first Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations to call a member of the Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) roster. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is committed to the full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life and ministry of the Lutheran church.

"This ordination can and should be seen as a bold call for change in the Church," affirms Salem member Sarah Kunze, "but it is also very specifically about the strength of Jen Nagel's pastoral ministry, and her unique gifts for leading Salem English Lutheran Church in honest, Spirit-led, transformational ministry."

Retired ELCA pastor and Salem member Rev. Roger Livdahl adds that “Jen has insights and gifts which make her uniquely qualified to give Salem leadership in our location of the city. We are inspired by her passion for ministry to poor and hungry people and others who are regarded as on the fringes of society.”

“I feel blessed to work with and for a diverse congregation that is willing to be transformational, to grapple with hard questions and take bold actions,” Nagel said following the congregation’s vote to call her as their pastor. “While I have been serving as the Pastoral Minister of our congregation for four and a half years, I look forward to the accountability and affirmation of the larger church that comes with ordination. The ELCA’s current policies have placed me and so many others in a ‘gray area’ of doing pastoral ministry without the recognition of and responsibility to the wider church.”

Nagel’s ordination and installation are just one step in the midst of a long process of change and renewal for Salem Lutheran. Faced with a large and unsustainable city church building, on October 29, 2006, Salem held its final worship service in their facility at 28th Street and Lyndale Avenue on the edge of the Uptown area of Minneapolis. For a period, Salem is sharing the nearby facility of their ecumenical partner congregation, Lyndale United Church of Christ. Together Salem and Lyndale are planning for a sustainable and green-friendly ministry center on a portion of Salem’s property, with new development of retail and housing on the other portion.

“Salem Lutheran is a welcoming church committed to Christ, our community, and the diversity of our neighborhood.” This statement describes not only Salem’s present mission, but the spirit of its 118-year history. The congregation’s full name, Salem English Lutheran Church, reflects the decision made at the church’s founding that the people would worship in the language of the new neighborhood, rather than German or Swedish or Norwegian. Still today, Salem seeks to practice a ministry that is contextual: that speaks the Gospel in ways that its diverse, urban community can hear and understand.

In worship, the congregation speaks a lively diversity of “languages,” with both a traditional service and a jazz service. In 2004, Salem became a Reconciling in Christ congregation, fully welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This welcome has become a stepping-stone toward a wider welcome that tries to cross lines of race, mental health, and social economic status. As Salem member Claire Kirchhoff expresses, “This ordination is the right thing to do because our faith is not about discrimination.”

Three retired Bishops (Bishop Emeritus St. Paul Area Synod Lowell Erdahl, the Rev. David Brown, and Bishop Emeritus of Southwestern Minnesota Synod Darold Beekmann) participated in the ordination service.

Facing increasing pressure to revisit its policy banning non-celibate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from serving as pastors, the five-million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) took up the issue at their assembly in Chicago in 2007. In January 2007, a popular openly gay Atlanta pastor, the Rev. Bradley Schmeling, was placed on church trial after

telling his bishop that he was in a same-gender relationship. While the ELCA disciplinary committee recommended Schmeling's removal, they expressed opposition to the policy and recommended that it be overturned. Twenty-one of the ELCA's sixty-five synods passed recommendations that the policy be overturned by the national assembly. The biennial assembly fell short of overturning the policy, but instead passed a resolution recommending bishops "refrain from or show restraint" in discipline of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender pastors and their congregations.

On November 17, 2007, when the Rev. Jen Rude was ordained extraordinarily in Chicago, Bishop Wayne Miller of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod publicly stated that he would take no actions against the congregation. Bishop Craig Johnson has not taken a public position on what, if any, disciplinary measures are being considered for Salem English Lutheran Church.

The Rev. Jen Nagel and her partner, the Rev. Jane McBride, have been partners in life for nine years. Nagel completed a Master of Divinity degree from the University of Chicago-Divinity School in 1998 and Lutheran studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 1999. In 2000, Nagel was approved for ministry by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries after her ELCA candidacy committee in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod postponed her approval for ordination "pending a change in church policy." Seven years later, the policy of the ELCA has not yet changed. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is committed to helping Nagel and all the members of its roster do ministry now, as long as the church continues to say "not yet."

"We affirm Jen's ordination as we follow in the tradition of Martin Luther who, 490 years ago, led a reforming movement within the church that empowered congregations to call those pastors who could preach the gospel and administer the sacraments in such a way that God's good news for all people could be clearly seen and heard," said Rev. Erik Christensen, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries Co-chair."

Nagel's ordination will be the 13th "Extraordinary Ordination" in the eighteen years since the first ordination of openly gay pastors Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart in San Francisco, CA.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is a national non-profit that credentials and rosters openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people for ministry; supports these pastors by working with congregations that will call them and providing mission grants to support their ministry; and provides a network of support to the congregations and pastors. Fourteen ELCA and two independent Lutheran congregations are served by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries pastors.

Ordination and Installation of Jen Nagel January 19,2008 2p.m. CST

Location: Salem English Lutheran Church, 810 W. 31st, Minneapolis, MN 55408, 612-872-4650

Speakers Available on January 19,2008 1-1:30 p.m. CST:

Salem English Lutheran Church

Rev. Jen Nagel, 612-872-4650, jnagel@discoversalem.com

Claire Kirchhoff, Transformation Team Chair, 612-642-9557

Diann Uzelac, Treasurer Congregation, 612-728-3782

Paul Wharton, Vice President Congregation, 612-861-9590

Sarah Kunze, Transformation Team, 612-360-7959

Sandy Block, Transformation Team, 612-718-8496

Matt Potts, Transformation Team

Rev. Roger Livdahl, retired pastor, Salem member, 763-522-2062

Colleagues

Rev. Mary Halvorson, Pastor at Grace University Lutheran Church, colleague, involved with installation, 612-331-8125

Rev. Don Portwood, Pastor at Lyndale United Church of Christ, partner congregation, 612-825-3019

Retired Bishops Participating in Ordination

Rev. Darold Beekmann, Bishop Emeritus, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, 952-924-0106

Rev. David Brown, 952-841-9814

Rev. Lowell Erdahl, Bishop Emeritus, St. Paul Area Synod, 651-631-1044

Co-Chairs Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries

Rev. Erik Christensen, 773-235-5420

www.elm.org

www.discoversalem.com

###