

4. In “Queer Kingdom” I use the word queer not as a sexual reference but in its deepest sense, as *intending to subvert something*. It suggests that perhaps Jesus was killed ... for being queer. And that Jesus returns to life in us when we choose to be queer (by the world’s standard) in our own Christ-like ways. What strikes you with new power here? What doesn’t work so well for you?

5. “Now the Welcome” never says who is welcome. It simply invites the church to rehearse in song the story of welcome that is told in the gospels and Acts. My hope is that the church will be able to sense what the next “verse” ought to be. How does the tune help the message? What images in particular appeal to you? Are there images that puzzle you or turn you off?

6. “O Christ Who Came” uses a trinitarian structure to sing about Christ coming through the prophets, through Jesus himself, and through the Spirit. Again, no mention of GLBT persons, but a hymn that helps catechize a congregation about why welcoming GLBT persons today continues the work of Christ who always comes anew. How does *this* tune help the message? What images intrigue or enlighten you here?

7. “Hearts on Fire” is very GLBT-specific. Sometimes straight people are left wondering about the imagery because in places this hymn takes the secular story of the gay rights movements and makes it part of our sacred story about welcome. Can you “hear” everything that’s here? Ask others to help you if necessary. Of course there’s a risk in singing a hymn that leaves some folks feeling on the outside—but haven’t our hymns always done that? It’s only more noticeable here because it’s *we* who are on the outside. Think about that challenge: what do risk—what do we gain—by being as specific as this hymn is?

8. “Behold” does several unique things. It lets God sing with us: each chorus asks us to sing God’s response. Note how each chorus ends with God speaking a word of promise directly ... *to you*. This hymn also tells the story of God’s welcoming work from creation, through the prophets, through Jesus, and through those of us who throw the doors wide open to GLBT people today. By the final verse I hope that the people singing are thinking, “of course this is what comes next.” Have I carried you with me? What images intrigue or enlighten you here?

9. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.

10. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

## A Reader’s Companion for

### *To the Tune of a Welcoming God*

This **Reader’s Companion** is intended for groups (or individuals) who want to read through the book in a more thematically arranged fashion. It selects a little over half the material in the book and provides a brief introduction and a few suggested questions for reflection or discussion for each session.

You can use it to create a four-, five-, or six-session format. I recommend following the order of sessions provided here and using at least Sessions 1, 2, 4 and 6. Then, if you wish, you can add in either or both Session 3 and Session 5 along the way. But feel free to adapt this however suits your aims best! Within each session I recommend reading the proposed selections in the order listed (which is sometimes different than the order they appear in the book) because I’ve tried to arrange them so that they flow into one another.

Each session covers a relatively small total number of pages (ranging from 11-28), but since each session includes three or more short pieces, even the ones with fewer overall pages will provide multiple places for reflection and conversation.

I’ve included enough questions for each set of readings to let you choose, individually or as a group, the ones that are most useful to you. Use as many or as few as you like.

Thanks for your interest in reading my book with extra care. I hope you find this venture both insightful and empowering. If you have questions or comments for me about the book or my work, you can email me at: [tune59@comcast.net](mailto:tune59@comcast.net). You can read more of my writing and see my speaking schedule at <http://tothetune.wordpress.com>.

Happy reading!  
~ David Weiss

## Session #1 – My Journey as an Ally

(11 total pages of reading)

This series of short selections chronicles my own “coming out” as an Ally. Since no ideas exist outside of context—the lived reality of a life—it seems appropriate to open the door into my thought and faith by passing through, at least a little bit, the narrative of my journey. Interestingly, just as Genesis offers us two creation narratives, and Matthew and Luke offer two birth stories for Jesus, quite by chance I offer two different occasions by which to “date” my appearance as an Ally. For this session, read the following:

#38 Seven Straight Nights

#2 A Personal Word of Testimony

#3 Spirituality and Coming Out

#4 Words Offered at the End of the Day ...

### For reflection and conversation

1. “Seven Straight Nights” introduces my “Word of Testimony.” I wasn’t “ready” to become an Ally (is anyone ever ready?), but I couldn’t afford the price of silence anymore. What pushed me forward on this occasion? What pushed—or would push—you forward?
2. What biblical imagery do I use in “Seven Straight Nights” or “Word of Testimony” that strikes you? How do these images work differently than the biblical texts that have so often dominated this conversation?
3. On what basis do I ground my affirmation and welcome in these two pieces? Is this sufficient for you? Why or why not?
4. “Spirituality and Coming Out” introduces my “Words Offered” piece. How do I explain my silence at Notre Dame? What reasons have kept *you* silent in the past? What changed for me at Notre Dame? What changed for *you*?
5. In “Spirituality and Coming Out” what did I *gain* for myself by coming out as an Ally? What have *you* gained in your coming out as LGBT or Ally?
6. In “Words Offered” I rather ransack the Bible in a sort of a frenzy, looking for images that might speak “welcome” to my “unknown friend.” Which images are familiar, new, compelling, or unsettling to you? Share why.
7. My comments at Christ the King were, by date, my first public words as an Ally—and they were offered in fear and trembling. But there was something almost mystical about the way that “Words Offered” came to me. Both stories belong to my coming out narrative. What stories form *your* coming out, whether as LGBT or Ally?
8. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.
9. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

## Session #6 – Art as a Voice

(10 total pages of reading, plus hymns)

My writing style is all over the place. Although a polished essayist, I know that sometimes less direct and more artistic appeals work in different ways. So here I collect a few pieces that press my convictions as much through their aesthetic quality as through their appeals to reason or faith. For this session read the following (if possible, when you come to the hymn, sing them—or at least try to hold the tunes in mind as you read!):

#9 Pentecost: The Season of Anything but Ordinary Time (SAOT)

#17 Satire: Cleaning House in the Christian Church (CHCC)

#28 A Set of Seven ... With Orlando on my Mind (WOM)

#29 The Queer Kingdom of God (QKG)

Hymns:

4. Now the Welcome

9. O Christ Who Came

12. Hearts on Fire

13. Behold I Gather All to Me

### For reflection and conversation

1. “Pentecost” takes Paul’s well-known metaphor of the church as Christ’s body and his inspired hymn to love and suggests how they might speak to the issue of welcome in the church today. Part of the piece’s power is its carefully crafted structure that echoes word-by-word the familiar cadence of Paul’s passages. Thinking about the rhythm of the writing or the parallels I draw here, where does this piece open up something new for *you*? What does it go too far? Or where does it stop short? Could you imagine using it as a lectionary reading? How would that feel?
2. “Satire” was actually rejected by a large newspaper for being “too good”; the editor was worried that people wouldn’t realize it was satire until the very end—at which point they’d be too angry to appreciate it anymore. What do you hear as my central point behind the thick satire?
3. Be sure to read the introduction to “A Set of Seven” so you know how acrostics work. Each short poem is like a prophetic oracle: a concise vivid image that invites you to see a truth you’d rather not see or to claim a hope that seems too good to hope for. These are brimful of evocative imagery. Pick one and share why it strikes you.

5. In “Not Less than Pride” I use a powerful Adrienne Rich quote to capture the essence of self-affirmation found and displayed by queer persons in “the crucible of their own lives.” Ultimately, I suggest that they “prove” the possibility of an integrated sexuality and spirituality not by theoretically arguing for it, but by showing it in their lives (quite like the Gentiles do in Acts 10!). What keeps the church/world at large from accepting this? What gives the church/world the power to dismiss this “proof”?

6. “Who is My Neighbor” could just as easily have been grouped with the “Art” pieces in Session 6. I put it here because it weighs in on such a public, civil community issue. It begins by affirming the longing of love “to be known and celebrated in a wider community.” Do you agree with this? What else is at stake in the Marriage Equality debate?

7. Near the end, the “Neighbor” essay identifies the need to move beyond bandaging up those who are beaten to organizing in order to build a better society. When the Teacher says, “Go and do likewise” what do you hear *yourself* called to do? Overall, in what ways does this parable draw *you* in? Where does it *work* for you? Where does it fall short?

8. The “Sunday School” essay begins moves from the capitol steps to a Sunday School classroom. I consider it “public theology” because it employs our universal respect for the “wisdom” that sometimes flows “from the mouths of babes” to make its point. It also speaks to church folks, many of whom wonder, if we become welcoming, how do we explain that to the kids? Well, maybe we’ll discover that they can help *us* understand it better! When I identify myself as a “devout Christian man ... dedicated to raising children with solid Christian values,” whom am I trying to “hook”? And how do I try to bring my point home?

9. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.

10. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

## Session #2 – Biblical Perspectives

(28 total pages of reading)

These four essays all treat the Biblical material. In the first two (HNG, HOB) I begin with the “texts of terror” and then try to show why it is both possible and essential to move beyond these passages. In the third (MAG) I explore the travesty of the omission of any Acts texts from the (ELCA) Lutheran study materials back in 2004. And in the fourth piece (TCB) I explain why sometimes closing our Bibles in the most biblical thing we can do. For this session read the following:

#7 Homosexuality and the Newness of God

#22 Holding our Breath in the Face of Hate ...

#21 Missing the Acts of God

#26 It’s Time to Close our Bibles ...

### For reflection and conversation

1. In “Homosexuality and the Newness of God” I take on the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Is my interpretation of it familiar to you? Is it persuasive? Why or why not?

2. Also in “Newness of God” (p. 23) I suggest that at least one root of our discomfort with difference “reflects a fear that entered creation with the Fall.” How do you respond to that idea?

3. Next in “Newness of God” I try to “humanize” the nature of the biblical text without making it less sacred on that account—and then I offer my “portrait” of the biblical God as one of deep welcome and sheer surprise. I think both of these moves are important for us personally and as a church if we are to move forward in a spirit of welcome. Are these moves helpful or unsettling for you? What’s at stake in them—for *your* faith?

4. In the second essay, “Holding our Breath,” I take on all the “texts of terror” (as they’re sometimes called) and try to show briefly why none of them can be legitimately invoked as a clear word of God on this issue. Do I succeed in persuading you? Why or why not?

5. Also in “Holding our Breath,” in a move similar to “Newness of God,” but nuanced by six years of further study and engagement, I speak about the fall, the nature of the biblical text, and the character of God. I am trying to help good people hold dear a text that is at times *both* sacred and problematic—am I succeeding?

6. I conclude “Holding our Breath” by offering some pretty evocative imagery about sexuality. Does it draw you in, or put you off? Why?

7. In the third selection, “Missing the Acts of God,” I make a crucial move by indentifying a biblical text—Acts—that, if not explicitly “gay-friendly,” is explicitly “other-friendly.” In Acts we see the early church wrestling to welcome Gentiles who are in many ways a little too different for comfort. And we see the early church *practicing* the sort of perspective I affirm in “Newness of God” and “Holding our Breath.” Do you think including a careful discussion of Acts 10 would have made a difference in how Lutherans wrestled with the question of welcoming gay and lesbian persons had it been part of the official study materials? Why or why not?

8. What do you think of the various contemporary analogies I offer to the “restrictions” placed on the Gentiles in Acts 15?

9. The last essay here, “Close our Bibles,” asks us to practice today the same daring attentiveness to the Spirit that the early church showed in the Book of Acts. A well known saying goes: “When you come the edge of all you know to be true and all you see is darkness, faith is knowing one of two things will happen: you will be given something solid to stand on, or be given wings to fly.” When the Apostles came face to face with the Gentiles—in all their difference—they realized that God had given them not just a text to read but also ears with which to listen. How do we do this today?

10. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.

11. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

## Session #5 – Public Theology (OPTIONAL) (12 total pages of reading)

These five selections all qualify as “public theology” in that here I am trying to write *as a Christian* to a more *public* readership that I expect will include non-Christians. So the challenge is to make my convictions, rooted in my Christian faith, understandable—and hopefully persuasive—to those who may not share the faith, but might appreciate its fruits. For this session read the following:

#5 The Outing of Ellen: Why All the Fuss?

#15 A Matter of Pride ... A Matter of Faith

#16 Not Less than Pride ... Not Less than Faith

#27 Who is My Neighbor?

#35 Sunday School ... and the Politics of Marriage”

### For reflection and conversation

1. In “Outing of Ellen,” what do I suggest is the root reason behind the public furor over Ellen revealing that she’s lesbian? How much do you think the same dynamic is at play in the church?

2. At the end of the “Ellen” essay I walk a dangerous line. I do **not** believe that same-sex activity is sinful, but I suggest that *even if it were*, regarding gay and lesbian persons as *ordinary* sinners would humanize the way the conversation around this issue plays out. I still think that’s true, but I still think it’s a dangerous line to walk. And I’m not sure I’d write this essay like that today. What do you think? And why?

3. I use the Simone Weil quote (“Matter of Pride”) to expose the danger of making a moral distinction between orientation and activity. This clarifies my last question about the “Ellen” essay. My brother was alcoholic the last ten years of his life, but spent the last three years as a *sober* alcoholic. There was both a moral and spiritual difference between his “orientation” to and his *activity* toward alcohol. As a child my grandfather offended as many people by his left-handedness as my brother did with his drinking. Which case is more analogous to sexual orientation? The choice makes a **HUGE** difference. On what basis do *you* decide which analogy rings more true?

4. I note in “Matter of Pride,” the variety of ways that queer persons find the strength to resist the message to “mutilate” themselves. What do I identify as these ways? How many of them can you claim in your own experience as a grounds for resisting some sort of pressure (homophobia or otherwise) that challenges your integrity?

8. Working my way through four particular moments—Coming Out, Keeping Faith, Making Love, and Giving Life—I offer a wide-ranging vision of sexuality as sacred vocation. Few of us have been invited to think of our sexuality this carefully—or this spiritually. Keep track of the insights you encountered in each section and share them with the group.

9. At the very end of the “Burning Bush” essay I acknowledge that I didn’t spend anytime here wrestling with the texts that have been so problematic for the church. Elsewhere I treat them, but on this night I said simply “finally for me the texts fall silent.” Why? How loudly (or softly) do the “texts of terror” still speak to you?

10. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.

11. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

### Session #3 – Orlando (OPTIONAL)

(14 total pages of reading)

These five reflections all date from the 2005 ELCA (Lutheran) Churchwide Assembly at which we had great hopes for a wider welcome to be made real in church structures. Alas, it did not happen. But these pieces run the gamut from hope to despair to deepened resolve and determination. In some ways they tell the story of the Lutheran welcoming movement’s coming of age. For this session read the following:

#30 Calling Down Fire

#31 From Margin to Center: Holding our Ground

#32 When Worship Wounds

#33 Only a Matter of Time Now?

#34 Marked Forever with the Ambiguity of the Church

#### For reflection and conversation

1. The opening meditation, “Calling Down Fire,” invited those longing for justice to embody their prayerful longing all week in a series of simple actions. Would it be fair to call these actions “sacramental”? Why or why not? (Remember your catechism!) Do any of my suggestions particularly inspire you or unsettle you? Why?

2. Also in “Calling Down Fire” I am careful (p. 126) to avoid any claim to be working “magic”; it is not mine to promise “success.” What *do* I promise in this piece? Can you think of times in which you have “called down fire”?

3. I wrote “From Margin to Center” in the hours immediately after these events; it still strikes me as some of the best “raw” journalism I’ve written. My choice of words (e.g., margin, stolen, mustard seeds, good soil) is so *overfull* of meaning it still catches *me* by surprise. What do you learn about active nonviolence or Jesus or the theology of the cross in this piece?

4. In “When Worship Wounds” I do not mean to personally attack the bishop who preached that day; planning worship in such a politically-laden setting like the Assembly was no easy task. What pushed me over the edge in my anguish?

5. My central lament in “When Worship Wounds” was that, by avoiding any hint of “politics” or controversy, the Church made a profoundly political—and, in my mind, a profoundly sad—choice. In what way was such “neutrality” a devastating choice? What would you have done? And why?

6. “Only a Matter of Time” opens with biting sarcasm at times about the Church and its actions at Assembly. I don’t do this lightly. How does it leave you feeling? Do you think, was I right to write with this much pain dripping from my pen?

7. About halfway through “Matter of Time” I shift voice into something more like restless bitter resolve. What grounds my resolve in *hope*? What tinges it yet with a *restless bitter* edge?

8. At the abstract institutional level the (ELCA) Lutheran church has moved forward (e.g., the decisions of Churchwide 2009), but at the more concrete parish by parish by parish level the restlessness of “Matter of Time” stills rings true. In what ways—in your parish, your family, your friends, elsewhere—do you experience that restlessness yourself?

9. “Marked Forever” reads a bit like a “best of” compilation; it was my attempt to condense my entire Assembly experience into a single piece for those who weren’t there and weren’t likely to read the whole set. (I did manage to place this piece in the Minneapolis *StarTribune*, where it did reach an entire state of Lutherans.) Consider the closing image, where I liken those of us in Goodsoil to Peter at the campfire. We made a daring choice to not deny our kinship with Christ by keeping silent. When have you faced a similar moment of truth?

10. Identify one passage—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph—that especially spoke to you. Share it and say a bit about why you found it meaningful.

11. What other insights or questions came to you in these readings?

## Session #4 – Ethics

(23 total pages of reading)

Before the words “full welcome” would even be dry on the page, the unspoken question on many minds would be, “Well, what does this mean for sexual ethics? Is it *anything goes* now?” Of course not, but very little in our tradition has equipped us to deal with sexual ethics with anything close to the nuance with which we live the rest of our adult lives. In these two selections I offer some thoughts on how we might frame this important conversation. For this session read the following:

#8 The Bible and Homosexuality

#18 The Body as Burning Bush

### For reflection and conversation

1. “The Bible and Homosexuality” starts out by inviting my lecture hall of “Introduction to the Bible” students to reconsider everything they’ve assumed they “knew” the Bible said about homosexuality. I try to turn one student’s question about God’s seeming “ruthlessness” into a teachable moment. How do I try to “flip” this word to make my point?

2. How do I respond to Debbie’s question (p. 36) about whether I’m just imaging a God more to my liking?

3. I have found it very helpful to explore the Hebrew wordplay of “to know” and “to make love to.” Is my introduction of this concept in “The Bible and Homosexuality” helpful to you? Why or why not?

4. Near the end of “The Bible and Homosexuality” I offer my “short list” of principles. How helpful do you find it? Any surprises? Would your list look like mine, or would you include other things?

5. In the “The Body as Burning Bush” I begin by suggesting that the burning bush is a powerfully evocative image in revealing things about “the character and purpose of God’s presence in our midst.” What particular insights do I in this image?

6. Next I propose that our bodies, like the burning bush, can indeed host the presence of God. It’s an audacious claim (although no more so than if it were made about a bush!) but I argue that to deny us this capacity is to shortchange God’s creating and incarnating activity. Can you agree?

7. I introduce the idea of “Body Theology” as our ability to “read” the presence of God in bodily experience. Can you identify times in your life when you have known God this immediately?