

## **Letter by retired pastor Paul Bosch to the clergy and people of the ELCIC**

February 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Delegates to the Eastern Synod Convention in June 2004 may recall that when the debate opened on the “local option” motion to ELCIC, I spoke in support of the motion, but I addressed both sides in the debate. In this letter to the whole Church, I’d like to elaborate the points I made in that address to Eastern Synod.

1) I heard a wonderful speech a couple of years ago by a professional counselor who said this: The people who give you the most grief in your life—who make you mad, who cause you sorrow or pain or even anger—these may turn out to be your best teachers. And further, he said—and this was even more surprising to me—you have probably INVITED them into your life because at some level you know you need them.

So I encourage people on both sides of this issue to think of your opponent in this debate, your adversary, in these terms: Not only as a member of your Christian family, but also as YOUR TEACHER, somebody who has something you need, somebody who is even a gift to you from God.

I believe with all my heart that’s true. No matter where you stand on the issue of same-sex blessing, you need to hear the voices on THE OTHER SIDE. This is a very difficult problem. In the almost 50 years since my ordination into the ministry of the Lutheran Church, I cannot recall a more contentious issue facing church people. And I see no sign of its going away soon. I see no evidence that we’ll resolve the differences among us, in this generation, or the next, or even the next. This issue will be with us, unresolved and unsettled, for a long time to come. Our grandchildren will be arguing over same-sex issues.

That’s why you need to hear every opinion on the subject. That’s why opponents need to think of themselves as each others’ teachers. I need you; you need me. Even when we disagree. Especially when we disagree. There are lots of lovely, faithful Christian people on opposite sides of this debate, trying to discern and to do what’s right. Through it all, God has appointed us as GIFTS TO EACH OTHER. That’s first and foremost.

2) My second point is this: Don’t fear the future. The future is in God’s hands. Leave the FUTURE there, in God’s hands, and don’t fear it. I alluded to Gamaliel’s advice (*Acts* 5:33-42) in my Synod address because his words seem to me to be wise counsel. If the “homosexual agenda” is NOT of God, if it is NOT God-pleasing, if it does NOT partake of the Spirit of Jesus, IT CANNOT SUCCEED, no matter how long it takes. I am convinced of that.

I am equally convinced that if it IS of God, if the Spirit IS calling the human race into a new adventure, a new world of justice and equality among all people, then IT CANNOT FAIL, no matter how long it takes.

And it will take a LONG time for Christians to reach any kind of unanimity of opinion on this topic. So any efforts to IMPOSE UNIFORMITY, by one party or another, are doomed to fail, at this time in our history. That’s why the so-called “local option” is the ONLY fair and responsible way out, for now. In “local option” everyone wins; nobody loses. Pastors and parishes may decide for themselves what’s appropriate, IN THEIR SETTINGS.

Yes, this will make for a certain amount of CHAOS in the life of Lutheran churches in Canada.

You won't find the same policies and practices everywhere you go. One parish may decide to bless gay unions, a neighbouring parish may decide not to. But that's the price we'll have to pay, for a generation or two—or three!—until the Spirit sorts this all out for us.

For whatever it is worth to you, I see the same kind of compromise—It's really not a solution; it's a compromise—in the case of gay ORDINATION: “local option”, this time at the Synod level. Some Synods may opt to ordain gays, some may not. Again, it will mean a measure of CHAOS, at the Synod level. But it's the only equitable way to go, in my view. It won't be the first time the Church has had to live with chaos!

And when the dust settles, three generations from now, and we hear more clearly the voice of God's Spirit speaking to us, I for one believe we will look back at this moment as a splendid *KAIROS*, a rare and thrilling opportunity in human history. We'll conclude that this moment IS of God, that God HAS inspired it among us, that God's Spirit IS at work here, calling us into a new and wider justice. This new and wider justice is unprecedented, sure. It is challenging and unsettling and even frightening. We've never before lived in a world where same-sex couples enjoy the same blessings that opposite-sex couples enjoy.

(But think what a testimonial that statement is to the integrity of so-called “traditional” marriage! Far from threatening “traditional” marriage, same-sex blessing comes as a commendation to it! It is an astonishing TRIBUTE to “traditional” marriage, when same- sex couples too want to enjoy its benefits and blessings!)

3) Finally: Don't quit. DON'T LEAVE. Don't run away. Stick it out for next year, and the year after. I for one do not intend to leave this Church, no matter how the votes turn out. Even if the vote goes against me, this year, or next year, or the next.

Don't leave, or threaten to leave. This issue, as contentious as it is, is surely not church-dividing. It is NOT an issue on which the Gospel stands or falls. And THAT is the only thing that matters. The Bible says almost nothing about sex or sexual matters. It says much more about idolatry, and about the arrogance of the proud, and about violence among nations, and about the rich and powerful abusing the poor and powerless. By an OVERWHELMING percentage! THESE are the issues that should engage our best and brightest efforts, not bedroom behavior. In this discussion as in others, we must strive to maintain some kind of Biblical perspective, and Biblical priority.

And if you left the ELCIC, where would you go? Other churches might welcome you, at first. But be sure of this: As the months and years go by, all church bodies, all institutions of society, will be facing precisely the same pressures and problems that are pestering the ELCIC right now. It's only a matter of time. If you're trying to flee, the press of history is against you.

I'll sign off with my favourite quotation from Martin Luther. It's from his *Small Catechism*, in his explanation to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. “What does this mean”, Luther asks, when we pray “Thy Kingdom come...”?

His answer is this: “The Kingdom of God comes indeed of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come ALSO TO US.”

I love that! The Kingdom of God WILL COME—is coming!—with or without any of us. Only pray that you—and I—may have something to do with its coming!

Fondly,

Paul Bosch, retired pastor  
member of Christ Lutheran Church, Waterloo, Ontario