

PASTORAL ISSUES IN THE BLESSING OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Pastor Cindy S. Jacobsen
St. Peter's Lutheran Church
Kitchener, Ontario

November 2004

This essay was composed at the request of the National Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to assist the church in considering the matter of the blessing of same-sex relationships.

Let me locate myself before I begin. I am a CAPPE Pastoral Counselling Specialist and an AAMFT¹ Clinical Member who practices ministry in a congregational setting. I have been ordained in the Lutheran church for the past nineteen years. I am female, heterosexual, and married with two children. I am a Doctor of Ministry Candidate in Pastoral Counselling at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. I have been asked to address the question, "What are some of the pastoral issues for the blessing of gay and lesbian couples in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada?"

Pastoral Counselling Specialists have a unique opportunity to inform theology out of praxis. As a pastoral counsellor, I sit with people on a daily basis listening to their stories and hearing of their struggles to live in covenantal relationships. Covenantal relationships include not only opposite-sex relationships but also same-sex relationships as well as the church and its relationship with opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

One's identity is basic to meaningful, human relationships. We understand God, the world and others by way of understanding ourselves. In that process of identity-building, our sexual identity plays an important role. "Who am I?" and "Who has God created me to be?" are essential questions. "Who are we as sexual beings?" is a crucial piece of the self-puzzle.

Joretta Marshall, in her book *Counseling Lesbian Partners*,² suggests that the social construction of knowledge along with experience provide a helpful framework for understanding identity formation. Our faith communities either help or hinder this process for many. Marshall points out that there are five societal perspectives of homosexuality. These perspectives include sexual

¹ CAPPE: Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education. AAMFT: American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy)

² Joretta L. Marshall, *Counseling Lesbian Partners* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

orientation and sexual behaviour. Faith communities and individuals in faith communities work out of at least one of these perspectives. Marshall's book offers a complete discussion,³ but the following are the five perspectives in a nutshell:

- Homosexual orientation and behaviour are condemned as sinful and immoral.
- Homosexual orientations are diseased, and homosexual behaviour is not justified.
- Homosexual orientations are defective, but homosexual behaviour may be permissible.
- Homosexual orientations are imperfect, but faithful homosexual behaviour is justified.
- Homosexual orientation is natural, and faithful homosexual behaviour is good.

As a Pastoral Counsellor Specialist, I work out of the last perspective. A community that is able to offer blessing offers a person a framework of acceptance for who they are. Identity is strengthened and enhanced. Are we not all children of God? Are we not all born into a fallen humanity? Yet, are we not all redeemed by grace through Jesus Christ?

When a faith community proclaims that we are created in the image of God, individuals in that community experience acceptance and wholeness. When I work with individuals and couples and they hear God's word of blessing, "I created you and what I created is good," they receive freedom and life.

³ Marshall, Chapter One.