

The Position of the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS) concerning Same-Sex Blessings

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In a paper recently posted to this page, Rev. Douglas Scott characterized the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS) as a “para-church organization” that “would likely offer a position on same sex blessings, even though their *raison d’être* is not exclusive to the issue of homosexuality.”

While Rev. Scott may think it likely, the fact is the STS has no position to offer on the blessing of same-sex unions, even though most of its members may share a similar perspective on the issue. There has been teaching among members in the Society on the issue of same-sex unions—as there has been on other issues of concern to pastors—but this is due to the nature of the Society and not any particular issue. The Society is a religious order, an oratory and ministerium, that has no confessional statements other than those in the *Book of Concord* and no agenda other than providing a support structure for ordained Lutheran ministers who are trying to be faithful to their ordination vows. Religious orders have a long history in the Church, of which the STS is a recent addition. As it has members from several Lutheran bodies (e.g. ELCIC, ELCA, LCMS) the Society does not become involved in the politics of particular Lutheran denominations.

While the Society is “committed to work toward the confessional and spiritual renewal of the Lutheran churches” it does so by providing its members with a discipline, set out in a document called the Rule, to help them fulfill the vows made at their ordination. For example, members commit to: formation in daily prayer; a life of obedience to Jesus; gathering for retreats, mutual pastoral visitation; confession and absolution; learning and teaching sound doctrine in the church; parish practice centered in the Word and sacraments; and to serve the cause of Christian unity. When subscribing to the Rule (thus joining the STS), pastors make the following vow before the membership gathered at the General Retreat: “Before God and my fellow pastors gathered here, and for the sake of the vows I spoke when I was ordained to the Holy Ministry, I [name] hereby subscribe to the Rule of the Society of the Holy Trinity, asking the help of God and seeking the support of this Society.” Note, the vows mentioned in the subscription to the Rule are the pastor’s ordination vows.

For any number of reasons, membership in the Society is not for every pastor. STS members do not believe they are better pastors than non-members, but rather believe that subscribing to the Rule helps them to be better pastors than they would be without the aid of the Rule and the support of their brothers and sisters in the Society. There is nothing in the Rule contrary to the vows taken by ELCIC pastors at ordination.

Contrary to what Rev. Scott implies, the STS does not presume any authority or voice in matters facing the ELCIC, nor does the Society believe that any believer be compelled to listen to it. Individual members of the STS on the other hand do presume voice and authority—but only by virtue of the authority and responsibility given them to teach and preach as ordained ministers, and not by virtue of their membership in the Society. At the same time one needs to remember that individual members have various opinions about any number of issues in Lutheranism—we are by no means of one mind on all matters. While members of the STS may share the same perspective on the matter of same-sex blessings, it is a perspective based on Scripture and the Confessions and not on membership in the Society.

Readers are invited to visit the STS web site: <http://www.societyholyltrinity.org/> and in particular to read an interview with STS Senior Rev. Dr. Frank Senn regarding the Society (originally published in *Confessio Augustana* 1:2005, 52-57).