

**The Authority rests with the Holy Scriptures:
Why the Local Option is not an Option**

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“Many Christians recite the creed as a regular part of their community’s worship with little sense of its controversial roots, history, or position in the larger world. Some sleepwalk through the words they memorized as children, bothered not at all by the outrageous ideas they are declaring their commitment. Others find elements in the creed personally offensive but deal with the scandal by freelance editing, passing over in silence or altering the statements they disagree with.”

The Creed, Image Publishing 2004, Luke Timothy Johnson., p.6

“At the same time, it (the creed) communicates a compelling vision of the world’s destiny and humanity’s role that challenges the accustomed idolatries and the weary platitudes of current worldly wisdom. Christians who say these words should know what they are saying when they say them and what they are saying when they mean them. This is a precondition to their celebrating a specifically Christian of reality, and the presupposition for their challenging the dominant conceptions of the world where they should be challenged.”

The Creed., p.7

Why the Local Option Resolution is not an option...

As Luke Timothy Johnson writes in his excellent book, *The Creed* articulating the nature of the Christian Church, he points out that the individual, being a sinner and prone by his or her nature to be finite and frail, makes all sorts of mistakes in his or her life. Humans do not escape their humanity by being received into the Body of Christ at their baptism, but rather if they have learned the faith well and have submitted their hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit, they learn what it truly means to be human; weak, frail, yet noble and capable of much good when walking in the shadow of the Almighty.

“We also acknowledge that no one of us individually believes as much or as well as all of us do communally. The church always believes more and better than any of its members. Does this mean that we act hypocritically when we say together “we believe?” Not at all: it is rather that we want to believe as the church believes, that we choose to stand together under these truths, in the hope that our individual “I believe” someday approaches the strength of the church’s “we believe.””

The Creed., p.46

The Church is the creation of God. It is his work, his creative and wondrous miracle washed clean by the water and the blood of Christ flowing from his heart on that dark yet beautiful day on Calvary. That day, all creation bore witness to the love of God as Jesus shed his blood for us all while creation itself sang hope back into the heavens (Rom 8:21) . The Spirit of Christ creates the Church, as the Confessions remind us, the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens and makes

holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in one common, true faith” (Book of Concord, SC, Kolb and Wengert ed., p. 355). God moulds the Church to be Jesus’ sacramental presence in a world desperate for hope, truth and love, not the world or human will or decision, but God.

As such, the Holy Spirit guides the Church in its doctrinal reflections upon God’s mighty acts of Redemption, Justification and Sanctification. God creates us, we do not create God.

The Church, as Luther taught in accord with scripture is the Church visible and invisible of the Church of the past, present and future. The teachings of the Church catholic belong to that Church, not to the miniscule body in Alberta or Canada or even of Europe; it belongs to the entire Church of Christ. That is why Luther fought the good fight he did, based upon the cry “ad fontes” or “back to the source” in response to the Roman Catholic Church’s corruption. Luther continually advocated that he was bringing nothing new to the table as he constantly referred to the Church Fathers. Let us not forget that Luther spoke as a Catholic hoping to reform the Church he loved and much has been accomplished since that day and much still needs to be discussed. But one of those doctrinal understandings is not marriage or sexuality between a man and a woman. This understanding of sexual matters in marriage has not been debated throughout the Church’s 2000-year history or in Judaism’s 5000-year history.

In the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.
Believing in one holy catholic and apostolic Church,
Remembering the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ that His followers may be one,
Responding to the Holy Spirit as He continues to call and gather the Church, The
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada hereby resolves to adopt the following
constitution to govern our life and witness in our country and throughout the
world.

preamble to the ELCIC national constitution

Why is the local option motion a duplicitous and dangerous motion that must be voted down?

1. The local option presumes to change a foundational teaching of Holy Scripture regarding the estate of marriage as ordained by God in the creation of male and female by simple matter of a vote by any congregation. As Lutheran’s we believe, teach and confess that Holy Scripture’s teaching is not decided by vote as God’s revelation is precisely that, God’s not our own. According to the Constitution of the ELCIC...

The Nature of the Church

Article 2

Section 3. This church derives its character and its powers both from its congregations and from its inherent nature as part of the Church universal. It regards itself as standing in the historic continuity of the communion of saints and as being an expression of that Christian fellowship in today's world.

Any congregation that assumes to change God’s word must be aware that they do so at their own peril for as the writer of Proverbs warns in 30: 5-9 (see Rev. 22:14-18).

"Every word of God is flawless;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Do not add to his words,
or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.
"Two things I ask of you, O LORD ;
do not refuse me before I die:
Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the LORD ?'

2. Consequently, the adoption of the local option motion at our next National Convention will fragment the ELCIC much further than it already is as each congregation will now theoretically be able to vote upon any doctrine of the Church. Precedent will have been given in our ELCIC by the passing of this motion. We will have abandoned the nurturing care of our mother (the Church universal) and rejected the plain sense of our Father's revelation, essentially becoming orphans when scripture declares God's love in Christ and adopting us as siblings to the Risen Son (Rom. 8:16-17; Gal. 4:7). Each congregation will in essence go its own way without a shepherd, since the Living Word is known and proclaimed by the Written Word.
3. Accordingly, there will be no longer any authority for what is true or not according to scripture as articulated by our National Constitution since we will have already by the passing of the local option motion declared that Holy Scripture and the Confessions are not our authority, but rather the 2/3 majority of the congregation.

Article 2,

Section 3 This church confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, through which God still speaks, and as the only source of the Church's doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the Church,

4. Bishop Stephen Kristenson has already in his Bishop's Letter for the month of April described quite well the fact that the militant pro gay lobby has not made their case in any sense from Holy Scripture, the Confessions or sound reason as to why the Christian Church should revise its understanding to allow for same-sex blessings.
5. The adoption of the local option motion would interfere with our ecumenical relationships not only throughout the Christian world, but within the Lutheran World Federation, and even with other congregations as divisions deepen across synodical, conference, cluster and within congregational lines. The communion of saints will become anything but that.
6. Our consciences are bound to the Word of God and faith in Christ, not to subjective, private interpretations, which are radically disparate from Holy Scripture and the voice of the Church universal for the last 2000 years. "The holy and righteous conscience of the Christian must agree with God's word: an erring conscience, separated from scripture, can react only in accordance with selfish desires resulting from weakness in faith" (A Statement of Pastoral and Theological Concern by 17 theologians of the ELCA, p. 2).

If the local option motion is adopted by the ELCIC in convention it will be devastating for church and society for at least these following reasons:

1. A radical devaluation of the place of Scripture in the life of the church.
2. A radical devaluation of Scripture's moral imperative – of the place of holiness, obedience, and repentance.
3. Ecclesiastical and civil marginalization, persecution, and even prosecution of those opposed to homosexual practice as the moral equivalent of racists (Re: Bishop Henry of Calgary www.religioustolerance.org/hom_marb45.htm)
4. Coercive indoctrination of our youth into patterns of sexual behaviour and belief that the united witness of Scripture deems immoral.
 - a. ELCA youth council
5. An increased incidence of homosexuality and bisexuality in the population, leading to an increase in associated health and relational problems (*The Bible and Homosexuality*, Dr. Robert Gagnon 2001a, pp. 395-429, 452-60, 471-89)
6. If Scripture is to be trusted, a heightened risk of loss of salvation for those who actively engage in homosexual behaviour.

According to the Constitution of the ELCIC Article Two, section Three, the Holy Scriptures are the sole rule and authority for doctrine, faith and life. Further explications are found in the Book of Concord. This article is not alterable according to the current Constitution.

As such, the Body of Christ teaches that there are core values that are revealed by God in His Word. Core values are those that are held...

1. pervasively throughout Scripture (at least implicitly)
2. absolutely (without exceptions)
3. strongly (as a matter of significance)

This applies all the more to instances in which:

4. such values emerged in opposition to contrary cultural trends and...
5. have prevailed in the church for two millennia.

If the authority of Scripture means anything at all to us Lutherans, those among us who wish to overturn its core values must meet an extraordinary burden of proof. The witness must be so strong and unambiguous that it not only makes the witness of Scripture pale by comparison but also directly refutes the reasons for the Bible's position.

Prior to the 1986 merger there were predecessor social statements that were and are still binding upon The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada up to and including the present time. As such, social policy statements such as the 1970's *Horizons for Justice* (section 400 in particular) are useful as they illustrate that there is indeed a "policy" (which follows from the teaching of the ancient Church catholic based upon the foundation of scripture) that concerns itself with marriage and sexuality.

However, since the national convention in Kitchener/Waterloo in 2001 the *Horizons For Justice* policy statement section 400 has gained much notoriety in that for no stated reason it has been

described as inadequate and outdated for our times. According to the *Canada Lutheran*, April/May edition p.35

“Briefly, it is proposed that:

- 1) the ELCIC suspend the application of references to homosexuality and homosexual behaviour as used in *Sex, Marriage and the Family*, a social statement of the Lutheran Church in America, 1970;”
- 2) The ELCIC allow pastors to perform blessings same sex couples, only if the pastor and a two-third majority consent, and after consultation with the synodical bishop; and
- 3) The ELCIC’s Program Development Committee for Worship develop a provisional rite for the blessings.

No explanations have been offered as to how society or the nature of marriage has changed in the last 30 years in order to justify why this particular policy statement of our church should be changed.

It would be in order for us to look at section 400 of the *Horizons for Justice* Policy statement in gain some possible understanding behind the National Church Council’s actions.

Section 400: A Statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family

Adopted by the Fifth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 25-July 2, 1970

Sex, marriage and family are gifts of God in which to rejoice. Their essential goodness cannot be obscured by any crisis of our time.

As traditional moral codes are being challenged, there is a profound struggle to formulate bases of ethical judgment which have meaning for contemporary men and women. Powerful forces of social change, joined with discoveries in the medical and life sciences, influence all aspects of human existence. The church is concerned not only with specific issues and controversies, but with the basic Christian understanding of human sexuality.

Human Sexuality

Who are we? We are responsible persons made in the image of God. God created male and female, making sexual interdependence serve the divine intention for life-in-community. Scripture portrays us as relational beings whose true humanity is realized in faith and love with God and neighbor.

True humanity is violated by sin, which is our broken relationship with God and each other. This alienation expresses itself in all facets of life, including sex, marriage, and family. At the same time God works in these broken relationships, healing and freeing the forgiven to devote their efforts to the well-being of others.

Human sexuality is a gift of God for the expression of love and the generation of life. As with every good gift, it is subject to abuses which cause suffering and debasement. In the expression of human sexuality, it is the integrity of our

relationships which determines the meaning of our actions. We do not merely have sexual relations; we demonstrate our true humanity in personal relationship, the most intimate of which are sexual.

Marriage

Christian faith affirms marriage as a covenant of fidelity--a dynamic, lifelong commitment of one man and one woman in a personal and sexual union. While hereafter in this report the phrase "covenant of fidelity" is employed, and we recognize it as expressing a key insight about Christian marriage, in biblical language, it may also be helpful at times to express the same emphasis in other terminology through such a phrase as "mutual commitment to lifelong faithfulness" as a substitute for a "covenant of fidelity." Marriage is not simply a legal transaction which can be broken when the conditions under which it was entered no longer exist. It is an unconditional relationship, a total commitment based on faithful trust. This union embodies God's loving purpose to create and enrich life. As the needs of the partners change, the covenant of fidelity must be renewed by God's grace and continually reaffirmed by husband and wife.

This view transcends the civil understanding of marriage as a legal contract. A marital union can be legally valid yet not be a covenant of fidelity, just as it can be a covenant of fidelity and not a legal contract. Such a covenant is also to be distinguished from an identification with the marriage pattern of any particular culture, from the idea that an established structure is normative for all times, and from the legalistic notion that because two people have had sexual intercourse they are bound together forever. The existence of a true covenant of fidelity outside marriage as a legal contract is extremely hard to identify.

Marriage is ordained by God as a structure of the created order. Thus the sanction of civil law and public recognition are important and beneficial in marriage, as checks against social injustice and personal sin. The marriage covenant, therefore, should be certified by a legal contract, and Christian participants should seek the blessings of the church.

The relationship between husband and wife is likened in Ephesians 5:21-23 to the relationship between Christ and the church. This depicts a communion of total persons, each of them living for the other. As with the covenant between Christ and the church, the promise of fidelity is fundamental. Therefore, Christians regard marriage as a primary setting in which to live out their calling from the Lord.

However, many persons are single for varied reasons. There should be no exaltation of either the single or the married state, one over the other. It is a matter for gratitude when the conditions of life make possible free and open choices....

Some Current Issues

The following statements are not to be thought of as categorical laws or "Christian" solutions to the problems involved. Nor are they intended to furnish

easy answers to hard questions. They are offered as guidance to pastors and laity in their ethical decision-making.

1. Some Issues Related to Sexual Expression

Within the realm of human sexuality, intercourse is a joyful means of giving oneself in the mutual expression of love. It is within the permanent covenant of marital fidelity that the full potential of coitus to foster genuine intimacy, personal growth, and the responsible conception of children is realized.

Because the Lutheran Church in America holds that sexual intercourse outside the context of the marriage union is morally wrong, nothing in this statement on "Sex, Marriage, and Family" is to be interpreted as meaning that this church either condones or approves premarital or extra-marital sexual intercourse.

Scientific research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes of homosexuality. Nevertheless, homosexuality is viewed biblically as a departure from the heterosexual structure of God's creation. Persons who engage in homosexual behavior are sinners only as are all other persons--alienated from God and neighbor. However, they are often the special and undeserving victims of prejudice and discrimination in law, law enforcement, cultural mores, and congregation life. In relation to this area of concern, the sexual behavior of freely consenting adults in private is not an appropriate subject for legislation or police action. It is essential to see such persons as entitled to understanding and justice in church and community.

Sexual exploitation in any situation either personally or commercially, inside or outside legally contracted marriage, is sinful because it is destructive of God's good gift and man's integrity.

The church recognizes the effects of social environment and cultural traditions on human behavior. It seeks, therefore, to respond understandingly to persons who enter into relationships which do not demonstrate a covenant of fidelity....

Horizons for Justice: Lutheran Contributions to a Social Vision, Section 400

The National Church Council states, once again from the *Canada Lutheran* April/May issue p.35 that "the resolution has been written considering many points of view as well as with the guidance of theologians, pastors and lay leaders who provided papers for study and reflection to be used by delegates, pastors and congregations. These papers are available on the ELCIC website."

The questions that beg to be asked are...

1. Considering the NCC's acknowledgment that there is indeed a considerable bias (see Q/A section to resolution) in the submitted papers, in what way did the NCC "consider many points of view?"
2. Why was the April 1st, 2005 deadline for other submissions from other viewpoints pre-empted since the resolution from NCC was sent out in early March?

In conclusion, I contend that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is committing spiritual suicide by considering the theological agenda of the pro-gay movement as articulated by groups

such as Lutherans Concerned. We must take heed of the repercussions of recent decisions made by other Christian bodies such as the Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada which has led to ecclesiastical reprimand and admonishments to repent, as well as the 40% decline in membership experienced by the United Church of Canada since 1988. While the issue is not the matter of Church membership, it does concern our members in that the leadership of this body, the ELCIC, have taken a vow to,

“Care for God’s people, bear their burdens and do not betray their confidence. So discipline yourself in life and teaching that you preserve the truth, giving no occasion for false security or illusory hope. Witness faithfully in word and deed to all people. Give and receive comfort as you serve within the Church. And be of good courage, for God has called you, and your labour is not in vain”

Occasional Services. p.197.

If we are to preserve the truth, it must be grounded upon Holy Scripture, not culture or experience. Our faith and salvation is based upon a promise, for while our hearts are fickle and deceitful easily leading us astray if we would let it, His promises are sure and trustworthy (Jer. 17:9; Phil. 1:6). That promise is found only in the Living Word, Jesus Christ as revealed to us by the written Word, the Bible. We do a disservice to the world and cannot give true comfort to God’s people if we lead them away from the waters and the bread of life as found in God’s Word. I pray that we would remain faithful to the plain sense of Holy Scripture concerning the grace of God as given in the law and gospel.

I pray that we will be compassionate to hear and bear the burdens of those who suffer injustice and heartache in this world, but not at the expense of the truth. I pray that we may repent of our sins of apathy and complacency when we have not taught and loved consistently those whose sin we have winked at rather than lovingly admonished in Christ. I pray that we may take up the cross and walk in the shadow of Christ rather than capitulate to the world’s notions of truth and faith.

Respectfully submitted for consideration,

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Rev. Phillip Gagnon