

Statement on Same-Sex Blessing

(made to the Church Council of Sherwood Park Lutheran, Winnipeg)

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Let me begin by telling you a little about who I am and some of the factors that have shaped my perspective.

From the time I was young I have been blessed (and maybe also cursed) by the need always to see things from other people's perspectives. I want to consider issues from many angles before I form my opinions. Consequently, I am often slow with a verdict. Even after I have an opinion, I still want to hear and understand other people's perspectives.

Maybe at the heart of this is a conviction that more important than opinions are relationships. I hope that, even when I don't agree with another's opinion, nevertheless we can still have a healthy relationship. Jesus once said, "The greatest commandment is this: Love God with all your heart and soul and strength. And love your neighbour as yourself." I interpret that to mean that the most important thing is our relationships with God and with one another.

Another factor that has shaped my perspective is that I am a pastor. Over the years of my ministry I have been pastor to some homosexual people and to families that have homosexual members. I have sat with some and heard their stories. The stories are filled with pain, shame, bewilderment, struggle for self-esteem, questions about God's creation and love, and maybe most of all, longing for relationship. Many homosexual people (as do many heterosexuals) struggle with loneliness and long for acceptance, belonging, community, intimacy, love.

As I recognize how homosexual people have been pushed to the outside by society and church, I remember how Jesus made a point of associating with outsiders. He welcomed tax collectors and prostitutes and lepers—people who were rejected by the society of his day. In some ways, homosexual people have been the lepers of our society. What would Jesus do? I can't help but think that Jesus would welcome and associate with homosexual people today.

My perspective is further shaped by the fact that I am a Lutheran Christian. Lutherans have always looked to God's Word as the source of our faith, life, and teaching. In fact, that's what the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada says:

"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." (Article III, Section 3)

This same article is found in the constitutions of the Manitoba/ Northwestern Ontario Synod and of Sherwood Park Lutheran Church.

These things are part of who I am as I consider the proposal to allow a local option for pastors and congregations to provide blessings to same-sex couples, coming before the 2005 National Convention of the ELCIC.

I sympathize with the desire of many to make the church more welcoming of homosexual people. This is part of the motivation of many in promoting this resolution.

In theory, at least, the church already accepts homosexuals, and any sinner who walks in the door. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, baptized and communing and sometimes singing in the choir. No Lutheran pastor or congregation I know of wishes to exclude gays and lesbians from our fellowship. Those who do are guilty of self-righteousness, for we have all sinned.

However, the issue here is not welcoming gays and lesbians, but approving of certain sexual practices. By providing “blessings for same-sex couples,” the church would be putting its stamp of approval on certain sexual behaviour.

It would be hard to argue from scripture that same-sex intercourse is part of God’s intention for creation. In fact, there are very few passages in the Bible that deal specifically with same-sex intercourse. The ones that are there are unanimous in speaking against homosexual activity.

- Leviticus 18:22, for example, says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”
- Romans 1:18-32 talks about idolaters who worship not God the Creator but rather worship part of creation. Vv.26-27 say:

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

There are several other similar passages. However, the scripture that is most telling for me is the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2.

- Genesis 1:27-28 says:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth....”

- Genesis 2:18,21-24 says:

The LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ...So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

This is just the beginning of a trajectory through all of scripture that affirms God’s intention in creation that coupling and marrying be heterosexual. Jesus himself quoted both Genesis 1 and 2 in one of his primary teachings about marriage. In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus says:

“Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and

mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Martin Luther, one of our ancestors in the faith, in a defining moment in the history of the Reformation, when called upon by a court to withdraw his criticisms of the church at the time (in other words, to recant) said this:

Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures and with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.

Similarly, for reasons of conscience and lack of evidence from Holy Scriptures, I do not support the resolution on same-sex blessings. This action would be so contrary to scripture and the tradition of the church, and so threatening to the unity of the church, that the burden of proof is on the proposal to change our church's teaching. So far I have not been convinced by the proof offered.

I pray that God would continue to guide us, our congregation, and the church with gifts of wisdom and love as we ponder and debate these issues.