

A Reasonable Compromise

Sorry to disappoint you. This isn't an argument for or against same sex blessings. Those arguments have already been articulated by a great many of people in our church, perhaps in greater volume than we would like! This brief article is, however, a heartfelt argument in support of the National Church Council recommendation of a "local option" on the question of whether or not to bless those persons who are in committed same-gender relationships. Let me tell you why.

The NCC recommendations respect the fact that many ELCIC pastors and members have prayerfully reflected on this question in light of the biblical and confessional witness and come to very different conclusions as to what constitutes a faithful response. Like it or not, we are nowhere near being of one mind with regard to this issue. As such, it would be somewhat disingenuous for the ELCIC to categorically claim a single position to be the clear and unequivocal position of this church. Neither do the NCC recommendations ask us to formally alter our church's current definition of marriage. Indeed, the Council has wisely chosen to recommend that we consider this question in the context of a much broader study of human sexuality that will involve other denominational partners and might well take us several years.

The NCC recommendations do, however, respect the fact that the question of same-sex blessings—offering prayerful, liturgical support to those who live in committed same-gender relationships—can't continue to be left open. There are ELCIC congregations and pastors for whom this is a pressing pastoral question that will significantly impact the breadth and scope of their ministry. To tell these members of our family to wait an indefinite period of time while the rest of us sort out what we feel to be an appropriate pastoral response will only lead to continued controversy and, no doubt, to acts of ecclesiastical disobedience that will further undermine our continued fellowship.

The so-called local option requires:

- the consent of the pastor
- the consent of the congregation or calling agency as expressed by a 2/3 majority vote at a duly called meeting
- consultation with the synodical bishop
- use of a rite authorized by this church.

In my mind, this is a reasonable compromise. It provides a responsible way forward - albeit with the decision-making bar set quite high—for congregations who desire to offer prayerful support to those in committed same-sex partnerships. At the same time, this process protects the rights of ELCIC pastors and congregations who do not wish to be partnered in actions that they cannot in good conscience support. In my mind, this seems fair and appropriate given the polarity that exists within our church and our society with regard to this question.

Like most compromises, it is flawed and less than perfect. It is not what those on either end of the spectrum would want or hope for. But it does provide a middle way that allows us to live and function together until such time as a greater consensus can be achieved. As such, I think it's the most faithful response we can offer at this time in our life. That's why I will strongly support that which has been proposed.

Bishop Michael J. Pryse,
Eastern Synod