

Shark-Infested Waters: Thoughts on Caring Conversation Six and the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions

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"...in some sense or other, the attempt to make the marriage [between heaven and hell] is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable 'either-or'; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind." (1)

My name is Sandra Waller. I am a Christian and a member of St Paul's Lutheran Church in Niagara Falls, Ontario. On April 16, 2005, I attended the morning session of Caring Conversation Six in Kitchener Ontario. Ever since the fall of 2003, when I was present at a discussion on homosexuality and the Lutheran Church hosted by Faith Lutheran Church in Hamilton, I have been keenly interested in what the church has to say on this subject, and just where it is that we appear to be headed.

The focus in the morning session at CC6 was not (to my surprise) whether or not the practice of homosexuality is a sin—in fact there seemed to be a fairly general acceptance of the idea that “homosexual orientation is natural, and faithful homosexual behaviour is good” (2). Rather, the emphasis seemed to be on how Lutherans, given the polarity of opinion on this issue, will be able to live in unity and fellowship with one another if and when the motion for the local option to bless same-sex unions is passed at this summer's National Convention in Winnipeg. The answer to this unity question, according to what I heard at CC6, is the *local option*—congregations and pastors who wish to perform same-sex blessings can do so, those that do not wish to need not. On the surface, this sounds like a nice solution—we can ‘agree to disagree’ on homosexual practice, and each congregation can do as it sees fit. But I would like to present some thoughts on the implications of the local option path, and explain why I believe this would be a disastrous mistake on the part of the ELCIC.

Firstly, in order to accept the *local option* option, we must accept that both sides of the issue of homosexual practice are equally valid and that this a grey zone, open to interpretation -sort of a ‘you say **potayto**, I say **potahto**’ approach. This is totally false. If the practice of homosexuality is a sin, it is a sin, and its eternal consequences are so dire that we can allow no grey zone. It would in fact be gross negligence on the part of all of us who believe that homosexual practice is sinful, and that the wages of sin are indeed death, to quietly sit by while some congregations bless same-sex unions. This issue **IS** black and white—no grey zone exists.

Secondly, in the event that the vote on the local option does pass, and individual congregations can do as they please on this matter, what will happen to the ELCIC on the provincial and national level? Several of the papers (all very much pro-same-sex blessings) distributed at CC6 were written by professors at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. Will these professors be unbiased as they teach this subject to future pastors, or will they actively promote the ‘homosexual-relationships-are-good’ viewpoint to their students? And given the obviously pro-homosexuality climate at WLU, is it likely that those who believe homosexuality is a sin will support this

institution financially or otherwise? What about national gatherings and youth conventions—if I believe that the practice of homosexuality is a sin, am I likely to send my impressionable son or daughter to a youth convention where he or she will potentially rub shoulders with, or receive instruction from, those who actively promote the idea that homosexual behavior is normal and good?

My deepest objections to the local option for blessing same-sex unions lie with my inability to accept the ideas being promoted by those on the pro-homosexuality side of this issue. Lutherans who think the local option would be a nice, tolerant compromise need to be aware of exactly what it is that the pro-homosexuality side is teaching. Are you cognizant of the following?

1. In order to believe that homosexual unions are okay, you have to actively disbelieve and discredit the Bible.

First Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:24-27 state unequivocally that homosexual behaviour is a sin. Those who promote same-sex blessings have been arguing for years that the Bible doesn't *really* say this (the same argument Satan used on Eve!) or that the Bible was written for a different culture and isn't relevant to us today. Rev. Dr. David Pfrimmer, a speaker at CC6, compared opening the Bible to inheriting, upon the death of your mother, the house in which she has lived for the past 30 years. When you open the door to the house, you find all this junk that you have to sift through to see if there is anything important. Do we Lutherans really believe that the Bible is like a house full of junk? And if so, *who gets to do the sifting?* Martin Luther states in his Small Catechism that "the Bible is the Word of God...every word of the Bible is God's word, and therefore the Bible is without error...God gave us the Bible to make us 'wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,' and to train us in holy living".(3)

2. In order to believe that homosexual unions are okay, you have to accept/agree with the types of arguments being broadcast by those on the pro-same-sex side. Some examples are:

- i) Paul, writer of both Corinthians and Romans, condemned homosexual acts only in the context of orgiastic or promiscuous behaviour—he was unaware of the possibility of loving, committed relationships between adult homosexuals and would not have condemned such relationships.

Did you know that in the ancient world "Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practiced [homosexuality]. At this very time [when Paul was writing to the Corinthians] Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had him castrated. He then married him with a full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife" (4) ? I think Paul was very well aware of committed homosexual unions and *still* condemned the practice as sinful.

- ii) Homosexual acts are 'natural' for those born with this tendency, just as homosexual acts are natural for some animals. Dr. Harold Remus writes: "In other species equipped, like humans, for heterosexual coupling, same-sex behaviour is "natural" for some individuals, domestic and wild, according to various books and articles reporting on scientific research that verifies what farmers and others have long observed" (5)

As a veterinarian with ten years of experience treating animals who also grew up on a busy poultry, cattle and hog farm, I can only say that I have never seen any evidence that

homosexual orientation exists in the animal world. I find this perhaps the most ludicrous of the arguments put forth by the pro-same-sex folks and quite damaging to Dr. Remus' credibility.

- iii) Erwin Buck's *Studies on Homosexuality and the Church* is "extremely helpful" (6) to our understanding of the homosexual question.

Personally, I am ashamed to have this blasphemous piece of propaganda on the ELCIC website. Buck's *Studies* will only be extremely helpful if you are willing to entertain the notion that Ruth and Naomi were homosexual lovers, that Jesus condoned pederasty when he healed the Roman centurion's 'boy' (as did the Jewish elders who pleaded with Jesus to perform the healing in Luke 7:4) and that Christ himself may have been homosexual, given the existence of the 'beloved disciple'.

(For a superbly concise and lucid rebuttal to every such argument made by those in favour of the blessing of same-sex unions, I urge you to view Dr. Robert Gagnon's presentations at the What's At Stake Conference held out west early this year—your church council should have received a DVD copy a few weeks ago.)

- 3) **In order to believe that homosexual unions are okay, you must focus entirely on earthly fulfillment and gratification, and forget the eternal consequences of our choices and decisions in this life.**

I am amazed at how completely those who favour same-sex blessings ignore eternity. Have we forgotten that what we do here on earth really does determine where we will spend eternity? Do we think Jesus didn't really mean it when he said: (Mark 9:47) "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell"? Have we forgotten what Paul said in Romans 8:18? "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us". Have we forgotten that no matter how hard this life is, how deprived we may feel here on earth, that God can and will make it up to us in heaven?

I wish to close by presenting the following analogy.

Suppose that I am a Florida school teacher who has decided to take my class on a field trip to the seashore. It's a terrifically hot day, and when we arrive, some students are desperate to take a dip in the cool water. But there, in plain view on the beach, is a big sign that says: SHARK-INFESTED WATERS –NO SWIMMING! The kids can read the sign too, but some of them want so badly to go swimming that they start saying things like "Maybe that's an old sign and there aren't any sharks here any more", or "maybe somebody just *thought* they saw sharks here but really they were friendly dolphins". What, as a responsible teacher who loves and cares about my students, should I do?

Q: Is there any way that the students who think there are no sharks and the sign (which says there *are* sharks) can both be right?

A: No, there isn't. Either there are sharks or there aren't.

Q: What action on my part has the most serious consequences?

A: If I tell the kids they can't swim and it turns out there really weren't any sharks, the most I have done is spoil their fun. If there *are* sharks, and I tell the kids it's okay to swim, somebody is going to get eaten. Hadn't I better ere on the side of caution?

Q: Am I in any way persecuting my students, judging them, bashing them or marginalizing them by telling them they can't go swimming in shark-infested waters? Is it cruel to stop them from swimming?

A: No, I am not, and no, it is not. It would be horribly cruel to tell the kids to go swimming and then watch them get eaten.

Q: If I encourage the kids to go swimming in spite of what the sign clearly says, what are the parents of the kids who get eaten going to do to me?

A: Mark 9:42 "...it would be better for [me] to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around [my] neck.

Q: If I happened to have a fellow teacher with me who disagreed with me about following the warning on the sign, would it be okay for us to decide that some students could come with me (and not go swimming) and the other teacher could take the kids who didn't believe there were sharks in for a dip?

A: No, because those kids with the other teacher would still get eaten.

Lutheran Christians, the practice of homosexual acts is sin, and therefore, the 'local option' which would allow some congregations to encourage their members to enter into same-sex unions is totally unacceptable. Our response to those of our brothers and sisters tempted to give place to homosexual practices in their lives must not be to condone, encourage or bless these acts. We must point to what the Bible clearly says, and support, love and come alongside gays and lesbians as they struggle to live the holy lives to which God has called us all. I implore you not to pass the 'local option' at this summer's convention. Eternal lives are at stake.

References

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4. Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Corinthians* (Toronto, G.R. Welch Co. Ltd., 1975)
5. Remus, Harold. *Words, Words, Words On the Role of Language in Current ELCIC Discussions* (December, 2004)
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