

A PASTORAL STATEMENT  
REGARDING THE RECENT DECISIONS ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

By now you know that the Churchwide Assembly recently met in Minneapolis. While other issues were considered, including full communion with the United Methodist church, it was the issue of human sexuality that dominated the discussion and the actions of the Assembly. Attached in this Newsletter are two letters – one from the Presiding Bishop of the Church, Bishop Hanson and the other from Bishop Hoover our Synodical Bishop. Bishop Hanson most clearly lays out the actions taken on the matter of human sexuality and issues a plea for unity in the face of division.

Yet part of the action taken will leave Synods and congregations to determine whether they will or will not a) accept clergy or other lay leaders who are gay or lesbian and who are living in a “committed, monogamous, life long relationship” and b) whether that congregation will bless same gender unions. Clearly these are contentious and sometimes emotional issues yet we will be forced to address these matters in the coming weeks and months. For it cannot be denied that wherever you stand on the issue of human sexuality and the decision now to ordain gay and lesbian persons in “monogamous committed relationships” and to provide for the blessing of same gender unions, these issues will result in great damage to the unity of the church and to our relationship to the wider body of Christians who do not agree and will not agree with these actions. And despite the calls for unity and for patience, there are many within our own church already seeking ways to exit this body called the ELCA or to withhold their benevolence from Synod and therefore the national church

My concern for the future is based upon a number of issues which I have tried to summarize below:

- A. Because these decisions will now provide for individual Synods and even individual congregations to make their own decisions in the blessing of same gender unions and whether or not they will accept gay and lesbian people into ministry, I believe that we have nothing less than a recipe for chaos in the church. While the national church will attempt to adopt some standards for clergy behavior, each Synod will have a great deal of latitude and therefore there will be no generally accepted standards by which pastors and other rostered leaders can be held to account.
- B. Congregations and pastors may well find themselves at odds with other and members may well move from congregation to congregation simply because the majority in their previous congregation did not agree with their position. This has the potential to destroy the life and unity of that congregation.
- C. If a pastor seeks a call in another congregation will the litmus test now be, not what gifts and graces they bring to the congregation, but rather where they stand on these matters of human sexuality? And since some groups are already “recruiting” pastors who fit their congregations, then the ability of Synods to function in the call process is completely thrown into question.

- D. By taking these actions we have cut ourselves off from the wider body of Christians who will not agree with our actions. A vast barrier has now been placed between us and our sisters and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church as well as the vast body of those we call Evangelical Christians, not to mention those of our own Lutheran body in Africa and other nations who are far more conservative than we have shown ourselves to be and who have already threatened to sever ties with us. We have removed ourselves from the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church and now may well become nothing more than a splinter group within the church catholic.
- E. But it is the base denial of the authority of Scripture which causes me the greatest concern. We all know that for Martin Luther the authority of the Word of God was paramount and it was upon Scripture alone that he based his faith. The social statement on human sexuality was not well written from either a Scriptural basis or a Confessional basis and I, along with many others, was deeply disappointed with its reasoning and rationale.

So where do we go from here? First it is important to say that nothing will change immediately. Standards have to be drawn up for the process whereby Synods will approve persons who are gay or lesbian to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or other rostered leadership. Second rites will have to be developed for the blessing of same gender unions. And third congregations will need to begin the process of talking among themselves about these matters so that they can decide what position they wish to take.

As the pastor of this congregation my role is to serve all regardless of what position they may take on any social, cultural or political issue. But at the same time I believe that you need to know where I stand on these matters. I made my position clear when I first came to Christ church but let me reiterate:

1. I believe that those called into ordained ministry who are gay and lesbian or those who are heterosexual and single should remain celibate and those who are married should remain chaste within their marriage vows.
2. I believe that marriage is between one man and one woman and therefore, while I personally have some good and dear friends who are gay or lesbian, I cannot in good conscience bless same gender unions.
3. I believe that while the issue of human sexuality is not a church dividing issue, the authority of Scripture is. In this case I believe that the authority of Scripture has been compromised and therefore in some issues I now stand over and against this church body called the ELCA because I believe it has departed from the ancient teachings of Church and denied the authority of Scripture and the Confessions.
4. I believe that we have done irreparable damage to the unity of the church which we know as the ELCA and to our wider relationships with other Christian bodies.

5 I believe that this is only the tipping point for many in the ELCA after years of what I see as an undermining of the faith by changing the teachings we hold to be central. Such beliefs include but are not limited to the naming of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the denial of basic doctrines including those dealing with the life, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me be clear and reiterate what I have said to the church council - I will not lead this congregation out of the ELCA. But my concern is now, with these actions, whether there will be an ELCA left. Like the Episcopalians I fear that some form of schism is coming and that such schism will be painful and difficult and perhaps even gut wrenching. Brother will be set against brother and children against parents. Congregations in the same town will not agree with each other and some may choose to find another church home if they believe that this one has abandoned them. All of this will be sad.

For now then we at Christ Church will do this:

- a. We will continue to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, just as we have done for almost 276 years.
- b. We will adhere to the Scriptures revealed to us and passed down to us from the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.
- c. We will hold firm to our confessional identity believing that the Lutheran Confessions are indeed the true exposition of Scripture.
- d. We will preach the pure Word of God and administer the sacraments in accordance with the Gospel.
- e. We will honor the traditions and teachings handed down to us through the ages and we will hold firm to the faith in spite of the adversity which laps around us.
- f. But we will also now talk and study and above all pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in the way of truth and together we will make some decisions about what our future holds for us.

In the meantime I am open to any and all conversations that members may have on this matter. Please feel free therefore to contact me.

In Christ  
Pastor Rooney