

# **SAME-GENDER ISSUES AMONG LUTHERANS IN CANADA**

## **A Statement from the Council of Presidents/Bishops of Lutheran Church—Canada**

Recent years have brought separation and discord among Lutheran Christians around the world as various church bodies have departed from historic Biblical teaching and practice by approving same-gender relationships, both within their churches' membership and even in the ranks of the ordained clergy. This disruption will now spread in our country through the decision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to authorize its pastors to conduct same-gender marriages, as well as by its finding that sexual orientation is no longer an issue in certifying candidates for the ministry.

Because these decisions will be covered in the media, members of the larger Christian community and the Canadian public in general may mistakenly conclude that these decisions represent the position of all Lutherans in this land. In fact, the ELCIC is the **only** Lutheran church body in Canada which has approved such a departure from accepted Christian teaching. Further, although the ELCIC formally reports large membership statistics, nearly 40 percent of Canadian Lutherans who worship every week belong to congregations outside the ELCIC.\* In addition, it is known that there are churches and pastors within the ELCIC who are deeply troubled by these changes in their church body and cannot support them.

Jesus Christ declared, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will come one flesh'?" (Matthew 19:4-5). Both in its Canadian congregations and overseas mission stations, Lutheran Church-Canada (LCC) will continue to give witness to Christ's clear teaching that God designed marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. LCC will not ordain pastors who do not affirm this.

In holding this position, LCC is not speaking from the margins, but from the overwhelming consensus of Christian churches for the last two millennia, and also from the mainstream of ecumenical conviction today. LCC's solid commitment to historic Christian marriage is shared by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, as well as by the rapidly growing Lutheran churches in Africa and elsewhere.

Lutheran unity is not undermined by the faithful who cling to the Biblical teaching they received and have consistently confessed. It is not being ruptured by people resisting the changes now adopted in a few Lutheran church bodies. It is ruptured rather by decisions which claim to place a blessing on what God has not promised to bless, and by anyone who permits secular notions of justice to override the apostolic teaching of God's Word.

No one will deny that some Christian churches and their members have at times distorted the Bible's instruction on sexuality and marriage, twisting it to insult and threaten people who claimed same-gender orientation. We do not defend this, but rather we repent of such sin and ask God to help His people overcome it wherever it occurs. At the same time, we reject any notion that confessing historic Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality constitutes "homophobia," an irrational fear and hatred of people with same-gender orientation. Contrary to the claims of revisionist theologians, it is indeed possible to refuse their proposed changes to Christian teaching and life without feeling such hatred, and without inciting it in others.

We want Canadians to know that, both in Lutheran Church-Canada and in a number of smaller church bodies, there are Lutheran Christians in this country still deeply committed to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, and still dedicated to its clear witness on human sexuality, marriage and standards for ministry. For ELCIC congregations and people dismayed by their church's recent actions, we pledge our intercessory prayers.

We make this declaration to defend the rightful place of historic Lutheran teaching and practice in Canada, and in response to the saving love of Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness (Revelation 1:5), the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

The Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee, President  
The Rev. Daryl M. Solie, First Vice-President  
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The Rev. Donald R. Schiemann, President, Alberta-British Columbia District  
The Rev. Thomas E. J. Prachar, President, Central District  
The Rev. Paul J. Zabel, President, East District

*\* - This reflects local congregational reports published on the Internet by both ELCIC and LCC. This percentage does not include the weekly worshiping membership of smaller Canadian Lutheran bodies, for whom statistics are not readily available.*