



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

June 30, 2015

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the crucified and risen Christ.

Last week the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision announcing the right of same-gender couples to have equal access to marriage. For many members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, this decision is a welcome sign of hope and a time for celebration. Other members of this church do not agree with the court's decision and remain deeply concerned because of their understanding of Scripture.

This decision affects each of us, some profoundly, and we are not of one mind. Let us continue to accompany one another with prayer, love and mutual respect as we reflect on this new reality and remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians about the enduring power of God's love.

The ELCA social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” (2009) neither endorses nor forbids same-gender marriages and recognizes that we have differing understandings and convictions on this matter. In its decision, the court stated that “the First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths.”

According to this church's social statement on human sexuality, all decisions about recognizing, supporting and holding publicly accountable same-gender relationships are entrusted to congregations. Recognizing that the church is not of one mind on this subject, our 2009 actions provide that congregations and clergy should discern together whether to recognize such relationships and to what degree.

Pastors are to engage in conversation, discernment and partnership with the congregations who have called them prior to solemnizing or presiding over a same-gender marriage. On the other hand, no pastor is obligated to solemnize the marriage of any couple, same-gender or different-gender, whom the pastor cannot in good conscience marry.

As Lutheran Christians, we continue to be a church that engages in conversation and discernment in all aspects of our faith and life. Creating space for respectful conversation and dialogue continues to be an important part of our life together. A helpful resource for engaging in difficult conversations is [“Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues.”](#)

In addition, the ELCA Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and their Families Working Group remains in the process of completing its work. A report of the group's findings and possible recommendations will be presented to the ELCA Church Council at its November meeting.

We seek to see our differences as a gift to be celebrated as we live out that which unites us: the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ who leads us into mission and ministry in the world. In the midst of this change, we are first and foremost church – a church that proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ. May God bless, guide and strengthen you each day as you go in peace and serve the Lord.

Your Sister in Christ,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop