

Saskatchewan Synod

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

November 1, 2011 - Pastoral Letter to Congregations, Rostered Ministers & Specialized Ministries:

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the months since the national convention I’ve talked with pastors and congregational leaders about their response to the national convention motions regarding same-sex marriage and the lifting of the prohibition of partnered gay and lesbian persons from being pastors and deacons in our church. We’ve discussed the motion that declares our unity to be in Christ and not in agreement on all matters within our church. We’ve grieved the divisions that have deepened in some places. The recent meeting of Synod Council and Conference Deans continued the same discussion where we shared the impact of the national convention decisions on congregations, rostered ministers and specialized ministries.

At the Synod Council table and when meeting with congregational councils or members, I have assured them that the motions permit but don’t compel more inclusive ministry including same-sex marriages or blessings. The motions allow for discretion according to personal conscience, as informed by scriptures, Lutheran theology and the mission imperatives of each local context. In our conversations I’ve experienced mutual respect, careful listening to one another and heartfelt sharing of personal views on sexuality, church membership, trust and belonging.

St Paul wrote to the church at Rome about patience in the present time and faith in God’s promised peace. He wrote to the church at Corinth about remaining united in Christ in the face of internal division. He wrote to the Philippians with thanksgiving for their sharing in the gospel and he urged them to be of one mind in Christ.

I strongly believe that decisions made in haste are decisions people will regret in time, whether that decision is to vote on agreeing or disagreeing with the ELCIC, or severing from the ELCIC, or withdrawing membership from your congregation.

The Synod Council and Conference Deans join me in urging all congregations and rostered ministers to step back from hasty decisions about membership, church policies and your ministry relationship as pastor and people. Early in the new year the synod will be offering a facilitated “talking circles” process for congregations or groups of congregations. An atmosphere of respectful listening and talking will encourage understanding, reconciliation, and sound decision-making for the sake of good order and faithful ministry. Until such a process is available, I encourage you to be at peace; forbear with one another; put the best construction on what others say; and seek God’s healing presence in our midst.

Grace and peace,

Bishop Cindy Halmarson, on behalf of Saskatchewan Synod Council and Conference Deans

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