

# Saskatchewan Synod

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

## Pastoral Letter #3 – Encouraging Prayerful Reflection and Conversation

January 3, 2012

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

*The God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another in accordance with Jesus Christ.*

This benediction from the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* settings for Holy Communion is my prayer for you as we enter another year of God's grace.

Congregations are preparing for annual meetings, reviewing the past year and looking ahead to the challenges and opportunities ahead. The national convention motions will be under discussion in some congregations. Some congregations have already passed motions about how they will or will not implement the policy changes. Thank you for sending me letters with your decisions about local practices for marriage services and your preferences for future pastoral calls. Your decisions are noted and your letters are filed in the synod office.

Some congregations have decided to postpone any voting on motions until there has been free and open discussion. Some are waiting until things "settle out" in the church, taking their time to see what, if any, effect there is in the local congregations. As I said in previous letters, unless a congregation makes a specific statement approving or disapproving of the marriage or ministry motions from the convention, I will assume the "status quo" prevails with no same-sex marriages in the congregation.

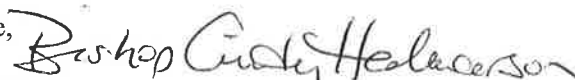
A process is under development in our synod to train facilitators as resources to congregations and parishes who want to discuss marriage, ministry and homosexuality in a safe, calm and respectful setting. We're calling it "Talking Circles". Facilitators will be trained in January and ready to respond to congregational invitations beginning in February. We hope that this resource will enable members of our congregations to speak freely and listen with care to those who hold different values, and ultimately, make it possible for our congregations to move forward in mission and ministry by the grace of God. The congregational resource for "Talking Circles" will be distributed later in January. Watch the email notices for information about how to book a facilitator for your congregation or parish.

Recommending motions for congregational consideration has proven more difficult than expected. After consulting with a number of individuals, I am prepared to offer several options. It is not necessary that congregations pass a motion, but for those that want to do so, the attached sample motions are offered for your consideration.

May God bless us all as we seek to be faithful to the gospel.

Grace and peace,

Bishop Cindy Halmarson



*Inspiring Ministry – Upholding God's People*

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Sample Motions for Congregations or Councils  
Bishop Cindy Halmarson  
January 3, 2012

*Congregations are encouraged to refrain from passing motions in response to the national convention decisions on marriage and ministry until members have had the opportunity to study the new Social Statement and the issues and express themselves freely on these matters. The “talking circles” process is one opportunity for speaking and listening in an environment of mutual respect. Some congregations have asked for guidance on wording for motions. The following suggestions are offered for the consideration of councils and congregations. If your congregation wishes to register their motions with the synod office, please send a letter following your council or congregational meeting to be placed in your congregation’s file. As always, proceed with care for the sake of your members and their families, your mission in the community, and our common faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Sample Motion of Welcome.

“This church is committed to being a loving and welcoming community of faith, centered in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel and in keeping with decisions of the ELCIC in convention, we welcome all people to join us for worship and to participate fully as members of our congregation regardless of their sexual orientation.”

Sample Motion to Postpone Action

“This congregation will refrain from considering any motions at this time regarding the calling of a gay or lesbian rostered minister or the performance of weddings for same-sex couples.”

Sample Motions regarding Calling Rostered Ministers

“ \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, \_\_\_\_\_ (location), a congregation of the Saskatchewan Synod, ELCIC, in keeping with its constitutional right (ELCIC Article VI, Section 2) to call or refuse to call, in consultation with the bishop of the synod, any pastor or diaconal minister approved for those rosters,

registers by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) its opposition at this time to calling a pastor or diaconal minister who is a self-declared gay or lesbian person.”

Or

registers by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) its openness at this time to calling a pastor or diaconal minister who is a self-declared gay or lesbian person.”

Or

registers by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) that at this time it will evaluate the merits of each pastor or diaconal minister to be considered for a call without regard to the individual’s self-declared sexual orientation.”

Sample Motions regarding Legal Marriages and Blessing of Civil Unions

“ \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, \_\_\_\_\_ (location) by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) registers

its opposition to the performance of ~~that~~ legal marriages or blessings of civil unions involving same-sex couples in this church building or as a pastoral act authorized by this congregation.”

Or

“ \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, \_\_\_\_\_ (location) by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) registers its approval to the performance of legal marriages or blessings of civil unions involving same-sex couples in this church building or outside this building as a pastoral act of this congregation at the discretion of the pastor.”

Or

“ \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, \_\_\_\_\_ (location) by vote of the *congregational council / congregation (choose one)* on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) recognizes that its pastor has discretion to choose to preside over legal marriages or blessings of civil unions involving persons in same-gender relationships either within or outside of this church building.”