



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
80 East 10th Avenue
New Westminster, B.C. V3L 4R5

July 21, 2011

To members of the BC Synod:

Friends,

Last week's National Church convention in Saskatoon will stand as a significant moment in the life of our church. While there were many resolutions debated and passed by convention delegates throughout the course of those four days, a substantial portion of our time together was spent reviewing the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality as well as three subsequent resolutions. The convention adopted each in turn. These resolutions addressed:

- the unity of the church, which expressed the desire that people and congregations may remain in fellowship with one another, even when holding divergent interpretations of scripture;
- a policy statement allowing ordained ministers to preside at or bless legal marriages, including those between same-gendered couples, in accordance with the laws of their province and in consultation with their local congregation, and
- a policy stating that sexual orientation is not in itself a factor which disqualifies a candidate for rostered (ordained or diaconal) ministry.

The wording of these last two resolutions is as follows:

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that rostered ministers may, according to the dictates of their consciences as informed by the Gospels, the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, preside at or bless legal marriages according to the laws of the province within which they serve. All rostered ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are encouraged to exercise due diligence in preparing couples for marriage. All rostered ministers serving congregations are encouraged at all times to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders in the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture within which the congregation serves.

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that sexual orientation is not in itself a factor which disqualifies a candidate for rostered ministry or a rostered minister seeking a call. Candidates and rostered ministers are in all cases expected to adhere to the qualifications and standards as set out in the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and of the synod within which they serve. Synods and congregations are expected to evaluate candidates for ordination or consecration and rostered ministers for call in accordance with a conscience informed by the Gospels, the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

I believe that these two resolutions provide our church with a way to walk together even as we might disagree with one another. No congregation and no pastor shall be compelled to perform same-gendered blessings or marriages; similarly, no congregation shall be compelled to call a

pastor whom they cannot accept or support. However, for those pastors and congregations who see this as a means by which they may more fully live out their ministry within their community, these resolutions enable them to do so within the protocols and procedures established by our church.

The challenge and opportunity before us now is to think about how these decisions will shape our life together in the context of our synod, where some congregations and individuals are greeting this news with joy while others find it very troubling. I call upon each of you to exercise patience, understanding, compassion and, above all, love as you engage in conversation and reflection. Take time to receive these decisions of the convention, reflect and pray upon them, and consider how your ministry might be informed by these actions.

There was much spirited debate regarding the Social Statement and the resolutions at the convention; people were passionate and compassionate. Throughout, there was respectful conversation and listening to one another. As a sign of the import of these resolutions, when the results of each vote were announced there was no applause and no attempt to frame the decision as a win-lose result; rather, there was respectful silence and prayer, each person knowing that while pivotal decisions had just been made, there also would be much hurt, sadness and disagreement in the midst of this.

I commend to you the Social Statement on Human Sexuality. If you have not yet had opportunity to read it, you may access it on the ELCIC website www.elcic.ca, click on "Resources," and there you will find the sub-heading "Human Sexuality." This link will take you to the Statement. There are three sections in this statement:

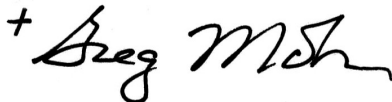
1. "Encountering the World in which We Live" provides a description of our society and the church's role within it;
2. "Facing God and Being Church" seeks to find common language to articulate the faith and theology that guides our life together; and
3. "Doing Ministry" explores how we might live faithfully in this world.

Other important resolutions were passed by the convention (such as "Encouraging Right Relationships with Indigenous Peoples" and the approval-in-principle of the "Structural Renewal" proposals). You will hear more about these in the coming months. However, I know that many people are wondering about the resolutions on human sexuality and how that might affect them and their ministry in their congregations; hence this letter being sent to you now.

We are the church together and we will continue to live with one another and be the body of Christ with one another. Let us move forward in faith, respectful of each other's positions, as we seek to be faithful to our Lord.

May God continue to inspire, direct and lead us.

Peace be with you all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Greg Mohr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

+Bishop Greg Mohr