

## Bishop's E-Message for September 2011

I could write you, as I usually do in September, about the re-starting and renewing of parish programming and what it means to our congregations and their leadership. I remember very well from my parish days the joy / anxiety that accompanied the start-up season and being back to business as usual. I know the gears are shifting in your place of ministry, and I join you in praying that all those individual and combined efforts to make Jesus and his Gospel known will be blessed.

But in the aftermath of the ELCIC National Convention in July I feel the need to comment further as your bishop. Bear with me. The ELCIC changed forever in Saskatoon. There is no going back. The elephant in the living-room now demands our attention and none of us is immune from having to respond. The Convention gave us a Social Statement on Human Sexuality and some alterations to our former ministry policies especially pertaining to our GLBT members and the possibility of their permanent monogamous relationships being blessed, as well as the possibility of their serving in the ordered ministries of our Church. No one, however, is forcing anyone else to do anything they do not believe they can do. This is a form of the local option for congregations. What would be helpful at this juncture then is that congregations begin to declare themselves on these issues and put such declarations in place in their policies. It would also be very helpful if, when you have arrived at a declaration, you could send a copy of your policy to the Synod office.

For many ABT Synod congregations there may be an unspoken consensus on where the congregation stands. Where this is the case, the unspoken consensus needs to become spoken. If you have that consensus, put your declaration in place and forward it to the Synod office. There are congregations, however, where that unspoken consensus has not been arrived at – where people feel very strongly on both sides of the issue. In those cases, I counsel that the leadership of the congregation not push for a consensus that does not exist. The result can be schism in the congregation, as our dear sisters and brothers in the ELCA can woefully attest. We have been wounded by the sexuality issue far too much already, and the price tag has been huge. It would be far better to make no declaration at this time, and pray for an emerging consensus in the future. Some congregations will adopt a form of the declaration I included in the FAQs. If this is done *before* a congregation is approached to perform a same sex marriage or blessing, this should be sufficient in law; i.e. it is not discriminating against a specific same sex couple, but is simply a stated policy of the congregation based on faith-convictions.

In all cases, I ask our rostered workers and congregations to proceed in a non-anxious, non-anxiety-producing way. Forcing yes/no votes in congregations divided on the issues will yield only losers – no winners. Be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves. Continue working toward the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace in your congregation. God help us all as we try to steer a faithful course. Grace and peace be with you all!

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop  
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