



# Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod [www.mnosynod.org](http://www.mnosynod.org)

201-3657 Roblin Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3R 0E2 Canada • phone: 204.889.3760 • fax: 204.896.0272 • [mnosynod@elcic.ca](mailto:mnosynod@elcic.ca)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

concerning decisions from

2011 Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)

(\*adapted from ABT synod documentation)

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### 1. What significant decisions were made at the ELCIC convention, July 14 - 16?

a) National Bishop Susan B. Johnson was re-elected as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada on the second ballot.

b) Several areas of the ELCIC constitution were amended by assigning them to the "Administrative Bylaws" of the Church.

c) A commitment was made to promote right and renewed relationships between non-indigenous and Indigenous Peoples within Canada, implementing the values and principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In doing so, members of this church were directed to consider the Kairos resource "In Peace and Friendship: A New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples".

d) Approval was given to (Motion #25) a new three-part Social Statement on Human Sexuality:

*1) encountering the world in which we live;*

*2) finding common language to articulate the faith and theology which guides our life together*

*3) seeking to stimulate conversation about mission and ministry at the local and global level.*

The Statement was approved by a vote of 213 in favour and 134 against. To find the entire text of the statement, go to [www.elcic.ca](http://www.elcic.ca), and under resources, click "human sexuality" and follow the links. More information regarding these changes - See HUMAN SEXUALITY

e) It was affirmed that disagreement over moral, political, or liturgical issues must not distort our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ or divide us from our Lutheran sisters and brothers in Christ. (An Affirmation Concerning the Unity of the Church) - Motion #26

f) The Assembly was in favour of rostered ministers presiding at, or blessing legal marriages according to the laws of the province within which they serve. They are encouraged to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders of the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture of the congregation. - Motion #27

g) A policy was adopted that removes sexual orientation as an impediment to ordination or consecration. It shall no longer disqualify a rostered person from seeking call in a congregation, thus rescinding the Convention actions of 1993 and 1989. - Motion #28

h) Recommendations of the Structural Renewal Taskforce were approved in principle, authorizing the national church council to move forward with the implementation process. More information regarding these changes, follows - see RE-STRUCTURING.

**2. In order to be approved, some decisions of the ELCIC Convention require a 2/3 majority while others require a simple majority vote. How is the vote margin determined?**

Article XX of the ELCIC Constitution specifies that "*Adoption of an amendment (to the Constitution) shall require passage at this and the next regular convention by a two-thirds vote of the delegates present and voting.*"

Bourinot's Rules of Order, latest edition, is the governing parliamentary law of this church, and Bourinot's states: "*For certain important issues, the by-laws or regulations often state that there must be a two-thirds majority for a motion to carry, in routine business a simple majority is sufficient.*"

The Convention Assembly agreed that the vote on a new Social Statement on Human Sexuality (Resolution #25) required a simple majority to pass and the Re-structuring resolution required approval by 2/3 of the delegates.

**3. Did our delegate vote the way we asked her/him on issues at the convention?**

Lutheran history has never had voting delegates who have been bound to vote in a particular way. Persons are elected or appointed by a congregation to this representative position based upon his/her commitment to the Lord and the church, prayerfulness in discernment and common sense in making faithful decisions on behalf of all, especially in light the Spirit's guidance and movement through conversation and prayer at the Convention.

## **HUMAN SEXUALITY**

**4. What has been the history of conversations around homosexuality as well as broader issues around human sexuality in the ELCIC?**

Conversations regarding human sexuality have been encouraged between and during previous national conventions for many years. Several resources guided our discussions and shared our opinions. Among them are: "*Horizons for Justice*" (a compilation of social statements adopted from predecessor bodies at merger); "*Six Studies on Homosexuality*" (Prof. Erwin Buck); "*Caring Conversations*" (a respectful way to listen to the stories of gays and lesbians and their families); essays written by various church leaders and published on the ELCIC website (to facilitate

discussion of the "local option" motions at the 2005 and 2007 conventions). In 2007, a Task Force on Human Sexuality was formed to work on creating a social statement. The task force used a consultative process in which individuals and congregations were invited to study and respond at a number of different junctures. Over 500 responses were received, reviewed and helped to inform the "draft statement", which now becomes our *ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality*.

## **5. What does this mean for our congregation?**

Social statements, once adopted, are considered "normative for the elected officers, staff and elected or appointed representatives of the church in representing the ELCIC". This also "informs" normative practice in our congregations. However, as was mentioned in the pastoral letter from Bishop Elaine, as with previous decisions that have involved a major policy change in the church (women's ordination and sacramental practices), each congregation needs to make decisions and policies that will work in their contexts.

## **6. It appears that there are two Scripturally-grounded, faithful viewpoints on this issue that we are trying to hold in place. What is the basis for these two perspectives?**

For all who support "*A Statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family*" (LCA, 1970), change in understanding and practice subordinates the Word of God to the unpredictable changes of cultural customs and human opinions. Seven texts speak biblical prohibitions against same-gender sexual conduct. They believe these texts are binding on Christians today even as they were on their original audiences. Others focus more on the early chapters of *Genesis*, recognizing that natural reasoning is a part of Lutheran heritage. In those chapters, they see a heterosexual intention in creation that shapes their interpretation of human sexuality and the institutions of marriage and family. Whether focusing on the biblical prohibitions or the heterosexual order of creation, these Lutherans read these texts in light of the Gospel, in the context of larger themes, and with compassion for individuals and communities, but always with the conviction that where the Word of God is clear and unified, it provides the only relevant measure of godly and acceptable behaviour.

Others who support the new "Social Statement on Human Sexuality" affirm the strong witness that the same seven biblical texts (same-gender sexual conduct) need to be read in their literary, historical, and theological contexts. As such, they understand that the witness of these texts is to condemn abusive or coercive sexual behaviour, or sexual behaviour that expresses rejection of God's sovereignty. In interpreting the seven texts, they conclude that these scriptures oppose unhealthy and unfaithful conduct by people oriented to the same gender. They believe the texts do not in fact address the contemporary situation of people who seek to live in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships marked by the same levels of mutuality, love, and trust that are found in heterosexual marriages. They believe these texts and others convey neither a rejection of those Christians (whose orientation is to people of the same gender) nor a rejection of publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships that bless the world.

## 7. What might this mean in our congregation?

There may be a wide diversity of opinion with respect to the "*Social Statement on Human Sexuality*" within the congregation, both from a social perspective and a theological perspective. "We all have biases and prejudices. When we use our biases to try to articulate God's will, we run the risk of abusing power and authority." (*Social Statement on Human Sexuality*)

If the "Social Statement" provides a new opportunity to study and discuss this issue, seize the opportunity in a spirit of love and of respectful listening to one another. In all cases, congregations are urged to recognize and respect the faith of members whose opinions differ, and to seek a common ground of understanding and practice that will move the congregation forward "in mission" in your community.

## 8. What if finding that common ground seems to elude our congregation?

Continue in conversation, pray, and reflect on Scripture, particularly with Scripture that deals with keeping the mission of the Church first and foremost amidst diversity and disagreements.

In Ephesians 4:2ff we read "... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you are called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all." To a congregation in Ephesus that was divided, Paul is trying to remind them of the things in which they have unity. Paul does not say that it is important that they have one doctrine or one understanding on everything. Their oneness is to be around the purpose of "building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Similarly, St. Paul will remind a divided congregation in Corinth, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit". (*I Corinthians 12:12 - 13*)

For the inner twelve which was a very diverse and divided group, our Lord Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:1).

How do we live into this unity of purpose and mission to which Jesus invites us, in spite of diversity of understanding?

Unfortunately, the Christian Church has a history of division in the face of disagreement, where both sides quote Scripture and display a certainty regarding the will of God on something in particular. We do not do so well at disagreeing in a manner which conveys the love of Christ to the other in the church, but more importantly to the communities in which we are called to serve. Will our communities look at our actions and be able to say, "See how they love one another"? (John 13:35)

This is not to minimize either the joy or disappointment that many feel with respect to this matter. But neither can we minimize what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ in which we have need for one another, even in the face of strong disagreement about this or any other matters. To find common ground and to mutually respect diversity among us is the intent of the motion that was passed at the Convention concerning the "unity of the church."

**9. What if a same gender couple comes asking for a marriage or blessing of their relationship before our congregation has come to that "common ground"?**

Pastorally, it is very important that couples (and pastors) are not caught in the middle of congregational discussions over this. So until your congregation has come to some decision on this matter, your congregational policy and practices must remain "status -quo" according to your existing policy.

**10. Will all Lutheran congregations be required to host same gender marriages/unions even if the majority of members do not support the approved "*Social Statement on Human Sexuality*"?**

No, it is recommended that rostered leader and congregation reach a prior consensus about how they will treat a request to bless a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship. It will be important to make congregational policies evident around how this will be dealt with in your congregation. If your congregation, according to the "dictates of conscience" feels unable to host same-gender unions in your building, commit yourselves as congregation and pastor to pastorally and non-judgementally assist same gender couples to find another setting for their marriage/blessing rite.

**11. What happens if the "dictates of conscience" of the rostered minister and the congregation are in disagreement?**

Certainly there needs to be conversations between council and rostered ministers to see if some kind of way forward can be worked out. Within the motion that was passed at convention, it reads "All rostered ministers serving congregations are encouraged at all times to conduct their ministry in consultation with lay leaders in the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture within the congregation." In other words, rostered ministers are under call to a congregation, and are subject to exercise their ministry according to the congregation's policies.

If the rostered ministers' "dictates of conscience" are different than that of the congregation, the minister may choose to resign, or if this becomes a source of conflict between congregation and minister, like with other conflicts, the bishop should to be consulted about next steps.

**12. How would we handle the call process if as a congregation, we would have difficulty with a rostered minister who was in a same gender union?**

Within the call process, congregations put together a congregational profile. Within that profile, it would be important to state the policies of your congregation. Candidates for call see that profile, and so if they see policies that do not fit with their orientation or convictions, it seems likely that

they would remove themselves from the process. Secondly, orientation and convictions would be known by the Bishop, so a Bishop's recommendation for or against a congregation calling a particular candidate should be listened to attentively. With regard to the interview process, while one needs to be careful with the way questions are asked for human rights considerations, there are ways of asking about their family, or about their practices in previous congregations, or specifically about how they feel about your policy that will assist you in discerning whether a candidate is a good fit for you.

**13. Can a rostered minister face a Human Rights Commission if he/she refuses to perform a same gender union?**

The MNO Synod has sought legal council on this issue. Legal counsel would indicate that a rostered minister is called to practice according to the policies of the congregation, and could not be taken before the Human Rights Commission if the policy of the congregation is only for heterosexual marriages within their building.

If on the other hand, the congregation's policy is open to performing same gender unions, but it is against the "dictates of conscience" for the rostered minister, as long as there is provision about how this can happen within the congregation, there should be no case.

**14. If our congregation supports the convention motions regarding same gender marriages or blessings, do we need to do anything?**

Congregations are encouraged to adopt this by official action for your congregation at a specially called congregational meeting or the annual meeting of a congregation. When forwarded to the synod office, the document will be placed in your official file. The suggested motion would read:

That " \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the MNO Synod of the ELCIC, adopts the policy that rostered ministers of this congregation may, according to the dictates of their conscience, preside at or bless legal marriages according to the laws of the province of \_\_\_\_\_."

**15. If our congregation, according to "dictates of conscience" chooses to continue to support heterosexual marriage only and/or would have difficulty calling a rostered minister who is in a same gender union, what do we need to do?**

Your church council or your congregation at a specially called meeting should consider adopting the following declaration(s). When forwarded to the synod office, the document will be placed in your official file.

**Declaration Regarding Marriage or the Blessing of Civil Marriages  
at \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church**

\_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the MNO Synod of the ELCIC declares that marriages, civil unions or blessings of persons in same-gender relationships will not be performed in this church building or authorized by this congregation.

**Declaration Regarding Rostered Ministry  
at \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church**

\_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the MNO Synod of the ELCIC, understands that it has the right to call, or refuse to call as a pastor or diaconal minister, any person approved for those rosters.

\_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the MNO Synod of the ELCIC, declares that this congregation will not call a pastor or diaconal minister who is or intends to be in a same-gender relationship.

**16. What changes need to be made to our congregational marriage policies?**

If your congregation has made the above declaration regarding marriage in your congregation, your existing marriage policy should be amended to say, "Please note that on \_\_\_\_\_ (date), the following declaration was adopted: (quote the declaration)."

If your congregation embraces the new policy of the ELCIC, your existing marriage policy could be amended to say: "On \_\_\_\_\_ (date), the following motion was adopted: (quote the motion)." In addition, your policy should state, "If for any reason, according to the dictates of conscience, a rostered minister of this congregation is unable to preside at or bless a marriage, alternative arrangements will be explored by the couple, the rostered minister and/or congregational leadership."

**17. Will Augsburg-Fortress, the publishing arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada be promoting homosexuality in Sunday School or Confirmation material?**

Andy Seal, Canadian Director of Augsburg Fortress confirmed that the Canadian position with regards to these convention actions are outlined in the statement that Beth Lewis, President and CEO of Augsburg Fortress gave to the ELCA when similar policy changes were passed two years ago in the ELCA. Beth said *"Augsburg Fortress has no plans for the foreseeable future to change the content of our resources related to any of the actions of the recent ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Our focus continues to be on creating excellent group use faith formation and worship resources for congregations and excellent text and reference materials for higher education."*

**18. What happens if our congregation wishes to leave the ELCIC?**

The process is outlined in the administrative bylaws of the ELCIC, Part II, Section 5. The first step according to the bylaws is to confer with the Bishop of the Synod.

**19. What happens to our church property if our congregation withdraws from the ELCIC?**

Your congregational constitution (Model Constitution Article V) allocates authority for property to the congregation. A congregation that conforms to the guidelines of the administrative bylaw of the ELCIC, Part 11, Section 5 continues to have authority for the property.

**20. Are there any legal/financial implications for a congregation that severs its relationship with the ELCIC?**

The congregation would need to legally reincorporate, which would also require application for a new charities number, etc.

Financial implications would involve paying the congregation's portion of the unfunded pension liability to the ELCIC, required by the Pension Legislator, which is the province of Ontario.

Normative costs for changing the corporate/charitable status of a congregation, according to Canadian law, would also need to be considered.

**21. What happens to our pastor if the congregation leaves the ELCIC?**

Your pastor will need to make a decision as well. The pastor may resign from the ELCIC and continue serving the congregation. He/she may need to go through a process to be received as a pastor in a new church body.

If the pastor decides to remain in the ELCIC, he/she can either resign from the congregation, and with the Synod Council's approval be listed on the "on leave from call" roster, thus declaring his/her interest in receiving a new call in the ELCIC.

**22. How does this policy affect shared ministry congregations?**

We are working with our ACC partners to address these concerns and will respond to these congregations individually. In terms of UCC partnerships, there should be no changes if the congregation adopts the new policy of the ELCIC.

**RE-STRUCTURING**

**23. How did we get to this place in our life together?**

In May of 1985, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada was voted into existence by 524 delegates; and supported by the 215 visitors who attended the historic event. There was an underlying excitement and hopeful joy. The new church officially began January 1, 1986 with an optimistic budget and a dedicated staff. Although efficient leadership conscientiously served the Church, by 1989 it was evident that there needed to be structural adjustments to make this Church more affordable. Since then, there have been reductions in staffing, both volunteer and paid. Most recently, the National Church Council gave a "Structural Renewal Task Force" the responsibility of looking at renewal with a "view (1) to equipping the church to be In Mission for Others and (2) to developing a structural framework which is flexible, affordable and sustainable."

### **What does this mean for our congregation?**

There are many ways to faithfully and creatively do "a new thing" always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As ecclesiastical structures and organizations are amended again...and again...in order to find a way to best serve, congregations and members individually, must continue to keep "the main thing, the main thing" - that is, to share the Gospel with others and "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (*Micah 6:8*)

### **23. How will these changes happen?**

National and Synodical Implementation Teams will be appointed and will prepare proposals - both constitutional and programmatic - which will be presented to the next Synod Convention (April 26-29, 2012) for approval.

### **What does this mean for our congregation?**

Congregations will have opportunity for further input into the emerging synodical structure by sending a delegate to the next Synodical Convention.

### **24. What significant changes will take place?**

- There continues to be a national (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) office, but there may be three (instead of five) synodical offices depending on decisions made at the 2012 synodical conventions. Mergers may occur between British Columbia Synod and the Synod of Alberta and the Territories AND between Saskatchewan Synod and Manitoba Northwestern Ontario; Eastern Synod will remain as is.
- Regional organizational structures, previously called 'conferences', led by deans will no longer exist;
- 'Areas' and 'area leadership teams' will be created to offer support to congregations;
- Conventions of the synod and of the national church will take place triennially, not biennially. With this comes the change in the term of bishops - from 4-year terms to 6-year terms;
- Fifty delegates to the national church convention (30 lay, 20 rostered), will be elected at proposed MNO/SASK Synod future conventions.

### **What does this mean for our congregation?**

Congregations who have budgeted either for a synodical or a national convention each year, will find the new triennial cycle to be a cost saving.

Congregations may not necessarily be represented at a national convention - the delegates will be elected at the synod conventions so it will be important to participate in the convention of the synodical level of the church.

The new 'areas' and 'area leadership teams' may be able to offer more local mission support to congregations.