



Southwestern Texas Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

June 26, 2015

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This letter is intended to begin conversation regarding today's ruling regarding same-gender unions across the United States. The United States Supreme Court ruled that all fifty states and U.S. territories recognize all legally performed marriages from all jurisdictions and to extend marriage to same-sex couples. So, what does that mean for our synod's pastoral leaders and congregations?

Remember that while Texas gives clergy and Synodically Authorized Ministers the authority to marry, most marry couples as part of their ministry in a congregation. This ruling gives the opportunity for congregations to provide a broader welcome to GLBT persons in the congregation and community. If you are serving a congregation, you are encouraged to begin a conversation with your Congregational Council about performing same-gender weddings. Many congregations have a wedding policy that address a wide range of topics, both on and off the property, which is determined by the Congregation Council.

Also, it is a pastoral decision to determine who he/she will or will not marry. The First Amendment right of freedom of religion protects authorized persons from civil liability for choosing not to do a wedding.

Finally, while this is the new civil law across the country, there is nothing in ELCA policy that prohibits pastors and congregations from performing same-gender weddings. However, there is nothing that requires it either. Remember that by recent Synod Assembly action, the Synod Council is charged to provide guidance for congregations for the welcoming of LGBT persons. They will address this issue at their meeting in September.

It will take a while to live into this ruling on same-gender weddings, so please don't rush to judgment. Use the skills learned in holding respectful conversations and practice hearing people who come from different experiences. The decisions of pastoral leaders and congregations may vary because the accumulated stories in one place are different than in another.

We build community-and we sense God's leading best-when we take time to walk with each other, listen, and pray for God's guidance.

My prayer is that we will be prepared for careful listening and conversations about same-gender marriage. There are plenty of resources available, and we are happy to be part of this conversation with you. Blessings as we minister to all of God's beloved people.

In Christ,

Bishop Ray Tiemann

