



Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Dr. Kevin S. Kanouse
Bishop
BpKevinKanouse@ntnl.org

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in the NT-NL Synod:

+ *Grace and peace be unto you from God our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* +

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12-17).

As the 11th biennial Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America draws to a close on Sunday, August 23, I write to you with a heavy heart and, yet, with a note of hopefulness. Let me first summarize the actions I am referencing. The Assembly voted by a 2/3rds majority to adopt a new social statement for our church. *Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust* has been before the church for several years and our own synod assembly voted support for the passage of the social statement this past April. Social Statements serve as documents to be used for education in the church. This document is not perfect, but it calls our attention to the proper place of sexuality in our individual lives and the scandalous reality of many abuses of human sexuality in our society. A small portion of the document speaks about homosexuality and, while it does not condemn it as some would have wanted, it notes the variety of biblically-based, deeply-held convictions people of our church have about the matter. I commend it to you, along with the other social statements of our church, for conversation and study.

We first voted that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policy changes, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another’s burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all. The other actions dealt with how congregations could recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and whether our church will allow those in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as pastors or other rostered leaders in the church. As you have probably heard, the assembly acted to adopt these resolutions. Our synod assembly was formally silent on these recommendations, but there are those within the congregations of our synod who hold heart-felt, biblically-based convictions about this matter, on both sides of the issue. Scripture

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1230 River Bend, Suite 105, Dallas, Texas 75247 • www.ntnl.org • Email: synodoffice@ntnl.org
Mail: P.O. Box 560587, Dallas, TX 75356-0587 • Phone: 214-637-6865 • Fax: 214-637-4805

speaks about homosexuality or homosexual acts as sin; scripture also challenges the law and calls us to an ethic of love and inclusivity for the community of the faithful. Until the moment of voting, I was unsure how I would vote. Through prayer, drawing on my understanding of scripture, remembering the tradition of the church, and out of concern for the impact of these decisions on all the congregations and members of our synod, I voted against these two resolutions. I know that this will hearten some and disappoint others. Your NT-NL voting members were not of a united mind and prayerfully voted their conscience, faith, and biblical understanding, as well.

Now that these resolutions have passed, what is next? The first impulse of many individuals and congregations may be to believe the church has left them behind and they cannot remain part of a church that has taken such a stand. I understand those feelings, as I have lived with them myself over the past few years and continue to do so. Many believe the church has abandoned the Word of God in the scriptures by being open to this change. I, personally and pastorally, do not believe this to be true. Those who advocated for the change are also bible-believing Christians and argue their positions from scripture reading and study. We are and will continue to be a bible based church that focuses on the saving act of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. Sexuality does not define us as a church, only the cross of Christ defines us.

These, then, are things that I want to acknowledge:

- 1) As these votes were taken, we were subdued. There was no celebrating or cheering. This decision was reached out of brokenness. We all realized that there is much work and healing to do to continue to be the church together. Because of these decisions, some will rejoice, but many will grieve. It is important that we bear one another's burdens, love our neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all, bearing each other's burdens and pain in a spirit of love.
- 2) No congregation in our synod or church will be required to accept as their pastor a person who is gay or lesbian. Congregations still have the opportunity to know who they are calling, their full background, and they have the right to decide the fitness of any person who will serve in their congregation. Your congregation will not likely be visibly changed by these decisions unless you choose for it to be so.
- 3) I am committed to remain in the ELCA and I urge you to make the same commitment. I will work with pastors and congregations who are hurt or feeling disenfranchised to discern how they can remain within the ELCA. Indeed, an amendment to the final resolution at the assembly called the ELCA to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.

I urge all of our members and congregations to pray for our church, congregations, and individuals who feel that they cannot bear with the church's actions. I ask you not to act in haste to leave your congregation or the ELCA. I ask that you continue to be part of our church as we continue the conversation...we need everyone's voice to move our church forward in *DiscipleLife*. Finally, in the spirit of St. Paul's words to the Colossians, I urge you to *bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord*

has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Grace and Peace in Christ's Love,
+ Kevin S. Kanouse, Bishop