

TOWARD AN AFFIRMATION OF WELCOME

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2004

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH New Hamburg Ontario

Advent Lutheran Church ~ Motion to the Eastern Synod Assembly

In 2002, the Eastern Synod Assembly approved the following motion from Advent Lutheran Church, Toronto.

That the Eastern Synod in convention 2004 vote on adopting the Lutherans Concerned North America "Reconciling in Christ" statement entitled "The Affirmation of Welcome", and that the Eastern Synod Council encourage learning, education, discussion and dialogue on this issue throughout the synod during the next biennium.

Reconciling in Christ (RIC) is a program sponsored by Lutherans Concerned/ North America (LC/NA) < www.lcna.org >. Started in 1984, the RIC program recognizes Lutheran congregations that welcome lesbian and gay believers.

I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbour just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbour. Since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.

— Martin Luther, On the Freedom of the Christian

The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) roster presently represents over 300 settings in Canada and the United States, including congregations, synods and campus ministries. In the Eastern Synod, the RIC includes St. Paul's, Guelph (Pr. Jon Fogleman); Augsburg, Brampton (Pr. Tom Doherty); Advent, Toronto (Pr. Michael Mills); St. John's, Ottawa (Pr. Joel Crouse); Lutheran Campus Ministry, Toronto (Pr. Herbert Harms). Other communities are contemplating joining in light of the following Eastern Synod assembly action.

Synod Council ~ Alternative Motion adopted by Eastern Synod Assembly

In the spring of 2004, the Eastern Synod Council proposed that the 2004 Eastern Synod assembly adopt an *alternative motion* to the one from Advent, Toronto. This alternative motion was received by the 2004 assembly which tabled the earlier Advent motion. The Synod Council motion was amended slightly, and adopted. It reads as follows:

That, within the context of our church's constitutions and enactments, the Eastern Synod affirm the principle that all persons are welcome to full participation in the organizational and sacramental life of this church regardless of gender, race, ancestry, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, age, record of offences, marital status, sexual orientation, economic status, family status, or disability.

and

That Eastern Synod, its congregations and specialized ministries be encouraged to examine their policies and practices and work toward embodying this principle in all aspects of their respective ministries.

and

That the Eastern Synod reaffirm its call for people living in Canada, both individually and in their public institutions, to respect the rights of all people regardless of gender, creed, race, ancestry, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, age, record of offences, marital status, sexual orientation, economic status, family status, or disability.

The Synod Council had published the following rationale for its motion:

In preparing these recommendations, the council recognized that persons can experience exclusion for a variety of causes. Council also recognized that the church's welcoming function is primarily exercised through its most localized expressions.

The welcoming role of synods is limited to that of extending participatory privileges to clergy and congregations who seek to affiliate with this church. Hence, while it is appropriate for churchwide bodies to ask congregations and specialized ministries to affirm certain principles in their practices of welcome, we need to acknowledge that the primary responsibility for enactment continues to reside with those more localized expressions of the church.

As such, the Synod Council believes that the synod should affirm a broadly articulated principle of inclusion that also acknowledges the continued authority of this church's constitutions and enactments, and then, encourage congregations and specialized ministries to embody this principle in all aspects of their respective ministries.

Synod Council further believes that these discussions provide a welcome opportunity for us to encourage the application of these same principles of inclusion within the wider public sphere.

Debate on the welcoming motion was respectful, passionate and lively. Ultimately, the motion passed by a margin of 283 to 79 or better than 78%.

K/W Conference ~ Caring Conversations

Over the last two years, Pastors André Lavergne and Mark Harris designed and led several "Caring Conversations" events for the Kitchener/Waterloo and surrounding conferences. Leadership included pastors and professors Tim Hegedus, Sarah Dille, Harold Remus, Bob Kelly, Eric Reble, Loretta Jaunzarins, Tom Doherty, David Schnase-Jacobsen and Jon Fogleman among others. Both well-attended and well-received, these events touched in various ways on the Scriptures, ethical decision-making, synod matters and how the church might become more welcoming of gay and lesbian Christians.

This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you.
— John 15:12

Trinity Church ~ Caring Conversations

In April & May, 2004, Pr. Lavergne led a series of Sunday morning adult learning sessions. The series was entitled Caring Conversations II ~ Aspects of Grace. The series followed upon Trinity's original and ground-breaking Caring Conversations (I) series, now several years behind us.

Caring Conversations II was well attended with between 35 and 50 people at each of four sessions. The outline follows:

April 25 ~ CC II: ASPECTS OF GRACE ~ Session 1 with the Rev. Dr. Tim Hegedus of Waterloo Seminary: *The Story So Far - Lutheran Grace.*

May 2 ~ CC II: ASPECTS OF GRACE ~ Session 2 with André Lavergne: *Synod's Affirmation of Welcome. Pastor Lavergne looks at the motions to come before the Synod Assembly.*

Lutherans view the Scriptures through the lens of grace and life through the lens of love.

—Pastor Lavergne interpreting
Pastor Tim Hegedus, CC II

May 9 ~ CC II: ASPECTS OF GRACE ~ Session 3 with The Rev. Dr. Oscar Cole Arnal of WLS: *A Little Bit of Luther. Oz offers Luther's take on marriage and related matters.*

May 16 ~ CC II: ASPECTS OF GRACE ~ Session 4 with André Lavergne: *Whereto from here?*

In connection with these various Caring Conversation initiatives, Trinity Lutheran Church has maintained a great deal of helpful information on the Trinity website. Go to < www.telc.ca > and follow the link to the "Caring Conversations" page.

Trinity Church ~ Toward an Affirmation of Welcome

In our last CC II session, we asked "Where might Trinity go from here?" The people who gathered for the session were provided with an early version of this document which was subsequently reviewed by Trinity's Council. This document, entitled "Toward An Affirmation of Welcome," has served to keep the Trinity community abreast of developments related to the creation of Trinity's own *Affirmation of Welcome*.

May 19, 2004 ~ Trinity's Congregational Council receives an early draft of this document and approves this outline for adopting an *Affirmation of Welcome*.

May-August, 2004 ~ An evolving draft *Affirmation of Welcome* is circulated to the congregation for reflection, comment and revision. Revisions are received by Pastor Lavergne and the current version of the *Affirmation of Welcome* is posted in the narthex.

June 25, 2004 ~ the 2004 Eastern Synod Assembly adopts a motion which affirms that "all persons are welcome to full participation in the organizational and sacramental life of this church regardless of ... sexual orientation."

In necessariis unitas.
In non necessariis libertas.
In utrisque caritas.

In essentials, unity.
In non-essentials, liberty.
In all things, love.

— Peter Meiderlin,
Lutheran pastor, c. 1620

August 18, 2004 ~ Trinity's Council unanimously approves a final *Affirmation of Welcome*. Council commends the *Affirmation of Welcome* to the congregation.

September, 2004 ~ Trinity's *Affirmation of Welcome* is reprinted in [Trinity Dove](#).

October 17, 2004 ~ Pastor Lavergne leads an adult learning session on Trinity's *Affirmation of Welcome* and implications. One implication is that Trinity could be rostered in accordance with the provisions of the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program of Lutheran Concerned.

October 24, 2004 ~ On October 24, 2004, the congregation adopts the *Affirmation of Welcome* published below. Some 130 people vote. The vote is a single vote shy of unanimity.

Trinity Church ~ An Affirmation of Welcome

The following *Affirmation of Welcome* is based on original work done at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church (Philadelphia) and on more recent efforts from Advent Lutheran Church (Toronto) and Augsburg Lutheran Church (Brampton).

The final version (draft 6) of the text reflects 1. comments from people who attended Trinity's Caring Conversations II adult learning series; 2. observations from members of Trinity's Council; 3. suggestions from members of the congregation; 4. suggestions from visitors to Trinity's website < www.telc.ca >; 5. suggestion from colleagues in ministry.

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

Whatever your country of origin or ancestry,
and whether you are religious or not,
Christian or not, or Lutheran or not,
you are welcome here.

Whether you are male, female or transgendered,
young or old,
straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual,
you are welcome here.

Whether you are single or partnered,
married, widowed or divorced,
you are welcome here.

Whether you are wealthy or poor,
own a home or rent,
live at home or are homeless,
you are welcome here.

Whatever your political views,
—whether to the right, to the left or to the centre—
you are welcome here.

Whatever your strengths or weaknesses,
gifts or challenges,
they will be honoured,
for you are welcome here.

Trinity Lutheran Church is committed to being a loving and welcoming community centred in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In faithfulness to the Christian Gospel, in reflection of our Lutheran emphasis on grace, and in celebration of our shared baptismal journey, we promise to enter into ministry with all who seek God here.

We invite you to join us for worship and to take up your place with us in ministry for you are welcome at Trinity Lutheran Church.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

The second is similar, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

— Matthew 22:36-40