



# A Convention Witness

## An Unspoken Word

As Trinity's 2007 National Convention delegates, we —André Lavergne & Emily Ritz— were prepared to speak on National Church Council's "Mission" motion. Among other things, this motion encouraged Synods to develop ways "to best minister to people who live in committed same-sex relationships, including the possibility of blessing such unions." As it happened, many more wished to speak than could be accommodated in the time permitted. When time was called, we were left standing in line at the microphone, unable to deliver our speeches. I had contemplated offering one of four prepared speeches (personal story, Scripture, Confessions, contemporary culture). Together with Emily Ritz's speech, two of my speeches are reproduced here.

— André Lavergne

### Emily Ritz Speech

Brothers and sisters:

I speak in favour of National Church Council's motion. There is a large part of me that simply doesn't understand. I don't understand why this is still an issue. I feel like our culture —the culture we find outside of our church— has already moved beyond it. For the younger generation especially, gay and lesbian relationships are simply a non-issue.

So how can we, as a church, possibly respond to our call to be "In Mission for Others" when we are acting behind the culture of these times? In order for this church to survive and to grow, we need to stay relevant —relevant to the wider culture around us.

As a member of the younger generation, I feel that the church is, and will continue to be, viewed as *ir-relevant*, out-of-date, and exclusive. For what are our primary goals as Christians? *To love our God...and to love our neighbours as ourselves.*

Instead, I find myself in a church that is rejecting and excluding the very neighbours that I was taught to love and treat just as myself. Because of this, I feel that the church is becoming irrelevant to my generation, which, as I said, has grown up in a world where gay and lesbian relationships are a non-issue. Now we see a church that rejects and excludes the people we have grown up accepting in our society —our colleagues, our family, and our friends.

It is obvious that our society is changing, that our world is changing. So let us stay relevant in this ever-changing world. Let us give synods the right to do mission for others, to embrace, and to minister, and to bless relationships —gay, lesbian, or straight. So if a couple —again whether they be gay, lesbian, or straight— wishes to commit their relationship to God, should we not honour that commitment, and bless their union in the church? Let's love our neighbours. Let's give them the same blessing and celebration that we ourselves can share in the church. And finally, let us remember our theme: we are a people called to be *in mission for others*. Let this church do just that.

Thank you.

### André Lavergne Speech 1

Brothers and sisters:

It's a Reformation principle —and one of Luther's— that the church be always reforming. *Semper reformans*. "Progress", said Luther, "is nothing other than constantly starting over." (See Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, 1970.)

As Reformation Christians, we are invited to challenge ... our theology: *Have we got it right?* ... our ministry: *Is it responsive?* ... ourselves: *Are we the people God would have us be?* Are we really a church in mission for others?

With many here, I hold that the Holy Spirit is calling us to do a new thing: to love and honour God's gay people as we do God's straight people. In the face of competing possibilities, I would see us err in the direction of love: To love our God with our whole being and our neighbours as ourselves—that's what Jesus said! Rich or poor. Male or female. Slave or free. Gay or straight. Love your *neighbour*. In mission for *others*.

Bishop Mayan recently directed us to Augsburg Confession Article 7:

*For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies . . . be everywhere the same.*

Our unity is found in the Gospel. As for blessing, it's not necessary that everything be everywhere the same.

For some of us that's not easy. It means that our future together might be different from our past. Uncomfortable. Scary. Messy. *United* but not *uniform*.

But that *is* our Reformation witness, is it not? We are a Gospel-centred people united in the Living Word embracing all of God's people with a generous spirit and much love.

NCC's motion allows us to be the people we were called to be: a people in mission *for others*. I support NCC's motion. I invite you to support it as well.

Thank you.

## **André Lavergne Speech 2**

Brothers and sisters:

I do not subscribe to a theology or a hermeneutic which sees being gay or being in a committed same-gender relationship as a sin. I discern that in neither the Scriptures nor in our Confessions.

A couple of years ago, I was widowed. We'd courted for 5 years. We were married for 24. We had a great run. And I will always be very, very grateful.

As Kim's world was retreating from her, her pain became such that we often could not touch. I learned what it is like to crave intimacy and be denied; to want to embrace or be embraced; or simply to hold or be held and to know that these were not to be. At length, I came to experience what many here have known, in varying degrees and for various reasons: that the world can often be unfathomably harsh, hurtful or inhospitable. That's just the way the world is.

To the extent that the church has added to such harshness among God's gay people, I am sad and not a little ashamed. But our world is changing. So I am grateful that NCC's motion contemplates the breadth of our church's mission, including the possibility of blessing and celebration where rejection and harshness have been the order of the day.

"Love your God," said Jesus. "Love your neighbour." We've not always done that very well. And shrouding our fears in an unwillingness to engage our world with compassion and love has only served to render our church ever more peripheral to our time and generation. "We are becoming irrelevant" one of our young people has said. For some who were once members of the church where I serve, we have already *become* irrelevant.

I am glad for the missional direction of NCC. The *Gospel* is our main thing. And the proclamation of God's *Word*—incarnate in every time and generation—is the locus for our confessional unity. Our mission is as varied as the experience of God's people. I support this motion. I invite you to do the same.

Thank you for listening.