



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

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August 18, 2011

Grace and peace to you.

This summer, Trinity's pastors attended the national convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Anne served as a delegate while André attended as a national staff person. At this convention, the ELCIC (1) adopted a *Social Statement on Human Sexuality*; (2) adopted a policy which would permit the marriage of gay persons in the church; (3) adopted a policy which would permit the ordination and call of gay persons under expectations similar to those of straight persons.

The full text of the *Social Statement* is available on Trinity's website.

The policies with regard to marriage and ordination are contained in a pastoral letter published by Bishop Michael Pryse. This letter is also available on Trinity's website.

For the people of Trinity, this has been a long journey. André writes:

Early in 1998, I was invited by a parishioner to bless her relationship with a woman partner. It seemed to her a natural request, one that any active parishioner might reasonably make of her pastor. Trinity had supported this young woman in overseas medical missions work and our community deeply respected her Christian witness. In those days, the matter of same-sex unions was not on the national radar screen and certainly not on the agenda of the church. Neither was it on my agenda. What to do? I agonized over the request. I consulted parish leaders and other important and considered voices. I met with my spiritual director and confessor. At length, however, I declined to offer the blessing. It was my pastoral judgement that Trinity was simply not ready.

On Saturday, October 31, 1998 —Reformation Day and the Eve of All Saints— the blessing proceeded in another venue and under the hands of a pastor of another denomination. I was deeply upset, and, in that context, I pledged myself to journey with our congregation in a process of discernment and conversation with gays and lesbians in our community. As I saw it, our parish had an ethical obligation to take up the difficult questions born of this real-world request for pastoral care. That was thirteen years ago.

Shortly thereafter, I learned that National Church Council was looking at the matter of how the church welcomes gays and lesbians. This was late in 1998 and early in 1999. A process dubbed a "Caring Conversation" was being contemplated and, in the summer of 1999, a *Caring Conversation* —a sensitive, structured conversation embracing gay people and their reality— was modeled at the National Convention.

I was moved —as were many others— as we experienced this single, short session. At the same time, it seemed to me that, for use in the parish, a fuller, several-session process would be necessary. I felt that the *Caring Conversation* itself needed to be located in a larger process of study, dialogue and discernment.

At Trinity, we elected to lead into the *Caring Conversation* proper with several sessions of Bible-study and to follow up with a debriefing and "whereto from here" session. All this was in the planning stages in late 1999 yielding our own ground-breaking and deeply moving *Caring Conversations* series in 2000. Following our work at Trinity, other communities adopted and adapted our several-week format to lead into their own *Caring Conversation*.

Since those days a decade ago, Trinity has played a significant role in informing the larger conversation around matters related to the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the life of the church. From 2002-2005, we were active in planning a series of well-attended Kitchener/Waterloo Conference *Caring Conversations* events.

Back at home, within our congregation, we initiated a second parish-based *Caring Conversations* series, the fruit of which was the adoption, in 2004, of Trinity's own elegant and carefully-crafted *Affirmation of Welcome*. It is available on Trinity's website and posted throughout the church. Trinity's *Affirmation of Welcome* has served as a model for congregations across North America and was recently republished (2010) by the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in their *The People of God: Unity in the Midst of Diversity* Bible Study Guide.

In recent years, Trinity's convention delegates have affirmed the direction now taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. In 2007, the proposed convention speeches by me and by Emily Ritz, and which anticipated the policies now approved by the church, were published in the congregation. Thus, the action of the ELCIC comes as welcome news, especially in this corner of the church, where it has been our increasingly clarified vision for the church for some years.

It is now 2011. The ELCIC, together with a growing number of other Christian and other Lutheran churches, has decided to open the doors of marriage and ordination to all of God's children, whether straight or gay. Thus, on August 17, 2011, Trinity's Congregational Council affirmed the policies of the ELCIC which bear on marriage and ordination. Similar action has been or is being contemplated in a number of area congregations.

For the people of Trinity, this means that, as opportunities arise down the road, Trinity's pastors would be able to accord the full range of pastoral ministry, including marriage, to all who might prevail upon us, whether gay or straight. We would be upholding the same standards, with equal pastoral concern and sensitivity toward all, in full expression of Trinity's own *Affirmation of Welcome*.

We wish to express our thanks to all who have participated in Trinity's discernment over the last 13 years, especially in regards to our *Caring Conversations*, the creation of our *Affirmation of Welcome*, and the extension of the ministry of the church to all of God's children. The people of Trinity may be proud of their early role in offering a clear expression of welcome to all and in helping to dismantle the barriers that separate or isolate God's people.

As your pastors, we look forward to our continuing Faithful Journey together. Not all of life's decisions come easily or quickly or with all aboard, all the time. That said, together with our Congregational Council, we pledge ourselves to our continuing journey together and welcome your prayerful support as we seek to embrace all of God's people by the grace of God, with the love of Jesus, in the continuing ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church, New Hamburg.

Enjoy the Labour Day weekend. See you at church!



Anne Anderson & André Lavergne
Pastors in the Community of Trinity Church

PS. Council has adopted the theme "Faithful Journey: from Welcome to Invitation" through 2012. Our program will include Back-to-Church Sunday (Sept. 25), Messy Fiesta (Nov. 12; area-wide event hosted by Trinity), Invitation to Easter (Lent, 2012; Trinity adult study), Faithful Journey: Expressions of Church (Easter, 2012; area-wide conference hosted by Trinity).