



**As events unfolded at a US church convention, a Lutheran in Canada found himself asking an important question.**

## Are we homophobic?

**D**uring the lead-up to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's 2009 Churchwide Assembly (ELCA), I was at a fellowship conference/retreat in Atlanta, Georgia with the twenty of the most able young minds and leaders in American liberal theological seminaries; the absolute cream of the crop with regard to academics and leadership in their denominations' seminaries. This group included three ELCA members studying toward ordination within the ELCA—one woman and two men; a couple of United Methodists; several Episcopalians; some United Church of Christ members; and a Unitarian Universalist. As the Assembly loomed and things began, so did the discussions—first among the Lutherans, then expanding to include everyone.

What made these discussions rare and interesting for me was that of the twenty members of this theological fellowship, several were openly homosexual and pursuing ordination.

This was hard for me because over the last year as I have participated in this fellowship and all of the retreats, conference calls, e-mails, Facebook chats, and personal phone calls, I have come to love these people. All of them.

These were people with whom I radically disagree and will most likely spend my life struggling against

in the theological/ministerial sphere; black and white, gay and straight, men and women; people who hold a high and low view of Scripture; who deny the Trinity and those who confess it with passion—my friends, my neighbours.

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### **My biblical stand placed me in direct conflict with people I love.**

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#### **Here I stand**

During the conference I made it very clear where I stood on the issue of ordaining homosexuals. I stood, and do stand, with the Holy Scripture, with our Lutheran Confessions, and with the testimony of the Church through the ages. This placed me in direct conflict with people I love. People who, were it my decision, would never be ordained while unrepentant about their homosexuality; who had heard all of this before, from the Church, often in hateful and denigrating ways; who

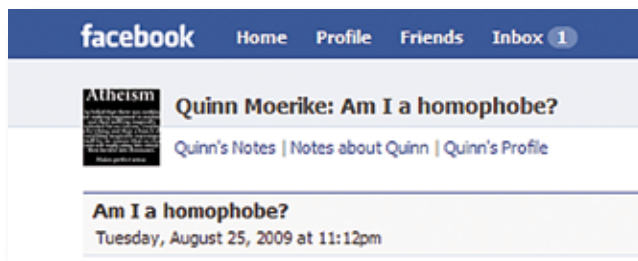
suffer deep wounds from a lifetime of struggle—people whom I love.

Their reactions to my stand were varied. Some affirmed my right to disagree with them. Others expressed profound disappointment that after a year of getting to know them, I hadn't changed my mind. Some were, and are still angry, perhaps feeling betrayed.

It is so much easier to caricature people with whom you disagree when you don't have to see them every day. When you get to know them, learn to love

them, and stand eyeball-to-eyeball with them, it is much harder. So when I expressed my opinion to the group, I felt the heat in their rage. I saw the flush in their cheeks. I saw the downcast faces. I saw the hurt in their eyes. This affected me greatly.

When I arrived home, I watched and waited as the ELCA Assembly continued with the more liberal elements carrying the day again and again toward the full inclusion of openly homosexual pastors in their denomination. I saw the pain in the impassioned



pleas for the acceptance of these measures by those arguing in their favour. They cried out for a loving God. They cried out for a loving church. To them, this action meant love.

I also watched the trembling and heartache

in those arguing against these measures, horrified at the violence being done to the Scriptures. I saw also their pain. I saw them also cry out for a loving God. I saw them also cry out for a loving church. To them, this action meant betrayal.

### A statement from Lutheran Church–Canada Ordination of Homosexuals in the Lutheran Church

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at its current convention has approved the ordination of people in “committed same-sex relationships,” it needs to be noted that the ELCA does not represent all Lutherans in the United States or North America. In its actions the ELCA is going against, not just the history of the Christian Church and against the practices of the covenant religion of Israel as expressed in the Old Testament (First Testament), but against the Bible, which the Christian Church has always recognized as the very Word of God itself. The traditional Christian understanding continues to be held by The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the United States and by Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC) in Canada, as well as by a number of smaller conservative bodies in both countries.

#### Background

For more than two hundred years much of Christendom has come to reject the previously universal recognition of the Bible as the Word of God written. By using methods of scriptural interpretation which see the Bible as a human book, a record of human response to the idea of God, rather than as God’s declaration of Himself, His nature, and His activities to the world, parts of the church on earth now look at Scripture with what is called a “hermeneutic [biblical interpretation] of suspicion” rather than the traditional hermeneutic of trust.

Under this new method of interpretation, words which previously were seen as the authoritative Word of God revealed through His apostles and prophets are now viewed as words composed by men seeking to maintain their power over others. In this understanding, the words of Scripture regarding marriage, which declare it to be the union of man and woman, and ideally one man and one woman in a lifelong union, are replaced by a preference for talking about “intimacy,” and commitment between two people that may not always include marriage in the traditional sense, or even, in recent years, a relationship between a male and a female.

Behind this change lurks an understanding of “freedom” which is in fact license, which flies against God’s clear word in Genesis 1 and 2 and restated by Christ in Matthew 19:3-6. Since a pastor is one who is to have a good reputation among Christians and before the world, for the church to ordain people who clearly flout the Word of God in their actions throws both the Word of God and the office of the Holy Ministry into contempt, and gives the rest of the world an excuse to continue in its sin.

#### LCC and Homosexuality

Lutheran Church–Canada desires to reach out with the Gospel to everyone, including the homosexual, to provide real healing of the person, so that their lives may begin to reflect the holiness God desires of all of His people. Those who may have such inclinations and who struggle against them are welcome in our churches, will receive forgiveness of their sins, and may serve in the office of ministry.\* Those who flout the clear Word of God, refuse to call sin what it is, and who seek to justify their behaviour, disqualify themselves from the office and indeed put their eternal salvation in jeopardy.

We recognize that our view is decidedly counter-cultural, but we know that we must continue to maintain the clear teaching of the Scriptures. We regret the decision of the ELCA, which, even by its own admission in its resolutions at this convention, goes against everything the Scriptures clearly teach and which the church has confirmed over the last 2000 years and even before.

*Rev. Dr. Edward Kettner,  
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\*CLARIFICATION: \*In the penitent person who has these tendencies, if the desires at times crop up they must be acknowledged as sin. But we also acknowledge Paul’s words in Romans 7:16-17, “Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good, So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” So, if a man recognizes the desires as sin, as the lust of the flesh that wars against the soul (Rom. 13:14), and by the power of Spirit denies himself (Matt. 16:24), rejects the desires and lives a model Christian life, it may be allowable for him to serve in the ministry, since his life and his teachings agree.

I could not help but wonder what love meant in this context. People on both sides were enraged. In private, accusations and name calling flew in both directions.

Heretic. Antinomian. Sectarian. Divisive. Antichrist. Unloving. Cold. Dead Christian. Bigot. Homophobe.

### Asking the question

I wrote a note on my *Facebook* page inviting my conference friends to join in. The note was titled “Am I a homophobe?”

Amazing things began happening. In both public forum and private message, discussions raged. Hurt and confusion bubbled to the surface. As I watched what had been sparked in my friends, it tore me up inside. I hated it. My God was asking me to do something incredibly hard—condemn the sin in the lives of people whom I love. I didn’t want to. I still don’t.

I have often heard that we are to love the sinner and hate the sin. But that is hard. How do you separate the two? And as one of my friends told me, when applying that interpretation, “Your love doesn’t feel like love.”

That means my love feels abusive, oppressive, and disingenuous. This is what my friends, my neighbours, the people whom I love, told me about my love. And it kills me. And it should kill you too.

### Our reaction

We shouldn’t use this time to point at the “other” Lutherans and shake our heads and roll our eyes and wonder how they ever got this far. We need to use this time to repent, to pull our speck out of our sinful eyes. We need to honestly question ourselves and our approaches.

Nor should we turn our back on the clear words of Scripture because those particular words are hard; to break fellowship with the Church Triumphant, all those saints in heaven who have persevered in the faith in order to hand down to us. This is not the time to say, in essence, “Don’t worry, God, You obviously were not as enlightened as we are. We’ll take it from here.”

This is the time to confess the historic and Biblical truths. We are to, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther, “call a thing what it is.” But we are to do that in love and penitence.

Many in the Church have used the thin pretext of religion to carry out acts of hate on the homosexual community. Repent.

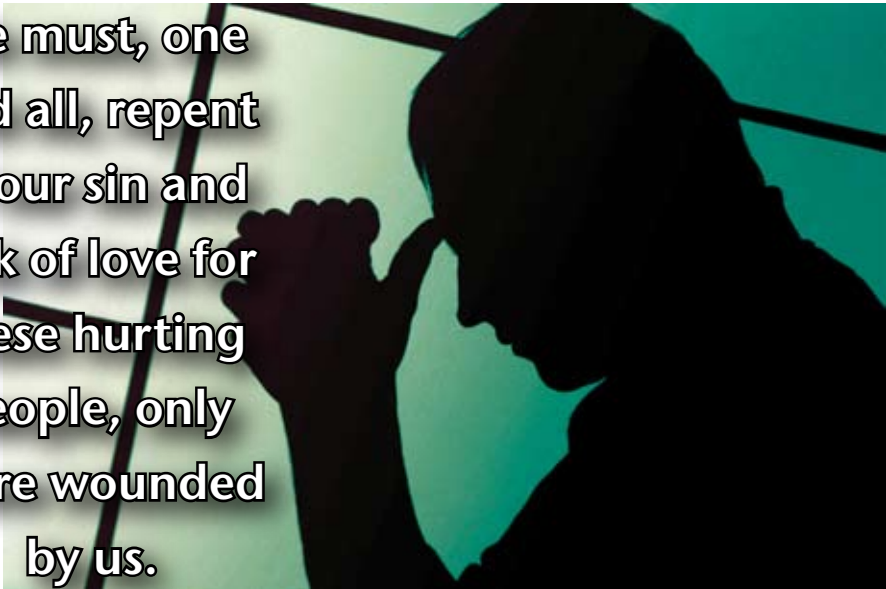
Many in the Church have acted horribly toward the homosexuals in their community, their congregations, and their families. Repent.

Many in the Church have been abusive and oppressive to the homosexual community in general. Repent.

We have failed as a Church—sinners all, living in a sinful and fallen world. Our Christian love has failed. Our loving dialogue with people struggling with these issues, our brothers, sisters, cousins, mothers, fathers, neighbours, friends, has failed. We must, one and all, repent of our sin and lack of love for these hurting people, only more wounded by us.

### Sin is sin

The Gospel message is not one of tolerance. God



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cannot tolerate sin. The Gospel message is one of forgiveness. This sin is no greater and definitely no lesser in God’s eyes than any others. It is our sinful nature that sees it so. The new creation God works in us must show the love of Christ in the world. We are forgiven in our multitude of sins. And even if the people we love never repent of their sins, we must still repent of ours, and still love.

Are we homophobes? If that means we call sin what it is, then yes. The world will label this scandalous message of the cross as bigoted and homophobic. However, if that label means we mistreat and abuse homosexuals rather than loving them, may it never be so.

May we please, precious Lord; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be a people of love.

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## A Statement from the International Lutheran Council Same-Gender Relationships and the Church

Recent years have brought confusion and discord to churches in various parts of the world—including Lutheran churches—as some church bodies have adopted resolutions stating that sexually active, same-gender relationships are an acceptable way of life for Christians. In addition, some have approved the ordination of pastors living in such a committed, sexually active same-gender relationship. The 23rd World Conference of the International Lutheran Council met August 26-31, 2009, in Seoul, Korea, under the theme, “In Christ: Living Life to the Full.” Our desire to proclaim and to live the abundant life in Christ compels us to make this statement in light of the current turmoil regarding same-gender relationships.

In evaluating the question of homosexuality, even in the 21st century, we believe we are ultimately dealing with the authority of Holy Scripture as the inspired Word of God. Even in the sensitive matter of human beings and their sexual identity, the church is to submit in humility to the authority of the Word of God. The Scriptures testify clearly and repeatedly that the lifelong committed union of one man and one woman is the place the Lord intends for human sexuality to be lived out. Biblical passages which address the practice of homosexuality do so in terms of disapproval. Rooted in the Bible’s witness and in keeping

with Christian teaching through 2000 years, we continue to believe that the practice of homosexuality—in any and all situations—violates the will of the Creator God and must be recognized as sin.

At the same time, we declare our resolve to approach those with homosexual inclinations with the deepest possible Christian love and pastoral concern, in whatever situation they may be living. Though we affirm the demands of God’s Law without reservation, we Christians confess that the sins of the world have been forgiven through Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. As the redeemed children of God, we lead our lives as “saints and sinners” at the same time. We hope for full renewal and sanctification, but realize that these hopes are not completely fulfilled in this life. This applies to countless temptations. Our sinful condition calls for a lifetime of prayer and struggle. Confession and absolution provide a welcome refuge to receive the Lord’s forgiveness, which He also offers through His Word and the Sacraments. This enables us to continue our personal struggles to live a God-pleasing life in the power of the Spirit.

*The preceding statement was adopted unanimously by the presidents and bishops of ILC churches, meeting in Seoul on August 31, 2009. Further information may be obtained from the ILC Executive Secretary, Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger, at: [samuel.nafzger@lcms.org](mailto:samuel.nafzger@lcms.org).*

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