

The Ministry of Solid Ground

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Equipping the Saints for God's Mission

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I'd like to take a few moments to reflect upon two events which were pivotal for me, personally, in eroding my confidence in the organization and functioning of the ELCIC. The first was the Regina Convention a decade ago. The second was the Eastern Synod Assembly in 2002.

The Regina Convention began innocently enough. But by the time the Convention had ended, the convention had granted the special gay-lesbian interest group, Lutherans Concerned, exclusive right, "carte blanche", to set the parameters and agenda for any future conversation concerning gays and lesbians within the ELCIC. The same convention further denied any group who disagreed with that point of view, such as Exodus International, the opportunity to present their alternative point of view at future conventions and church gatherings. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that in the subsequent years the public conversation in the ELCIC about gay-lesbian sexuality has reflected only a pro-gay point of view.

The politicking of special interest groups and the decisions of the larger church had till that time seemed somewhat remote and relatively unimportant to me as a parish pastor. I had assumed that the decisions that mattered most were made in congregations. But I had been both naïve and wrong. The larger church has a way of intruding and over-riding the decision-making powers that should reside in congregations. And many congregations are intimidated and too timid and placid to resist.

I have come to realize that the silent majority in our churches has been politically out-manuevered by a highly organized and well-funded gay interest group who have the ear of most of the church leadership. I have come to realize that constitutions can be altered and supposedly unalterable and binding statements of faith declared irrelevant by convention majority.

The second pivotal event was the Eastern Synod Convention in 2002. I was shocked to learn that support to consider motions to adopt the blessing of same-gender couples and the ordination of gays and lesbians was strong, especially among the clergy. It seemed that much of the leadership of the church, including the bishop and the Waterloo seminary faculty not only condoned the theological repositioning of our church. They seemed, in fact, to be actively promoting it.

Over the years I have assumed that the unity of our church is a confessional unity. Over the years I have naïvely and all-too uncritically assumed that the church leadership of our church as well as the seminary faculty would safeguard the confessional and theological integrity of the church as expressed by our constitutions. Sadly, I have discovered the contrary, however. In the conversation about same-sex blessings I have also discovered that the issue of same-sex blessings is merely a symptom of a far greater and far deeper disunity. I have discovered that there are in fact two irreconcilable competing theologies within the ELCIC. I have discovered that my understanding of the Scriptures is at variance with that of much of our leadership. And I have further discovered that many of those in positions of authority and power in the ELIC will

attempt to ignore, marginalize and even try to silence those who are calling for genuine dialogue concerning the role of the Scriptures as well as specific Scriptural passages, and thereby expose that fundamental disunity.

Following the 2002 Convention a group of concerned clergy and laity in the Eastern Synod were still naïve enough to believe that theological unity in the ELCIC could be restored. We believed that that unity could be restored by confronting our church constituency with the evidence of the Scriptures and our Confessions. That initial network was subsequently expanded to include others coast to coast.

But our efforts to revisit the Scriptures and the Confessions were either totally ignored or rebuffed by many of those in authority. Those who disagreed with the official position were caricaturized and vilified as intolerant, divisive or even subversive.

On his cross-Canada tour to garner support for same-gender blessings at the National Convention Bishop Schultz is presenting, I assume, the distilled theological position of the National Church Council. The first presentation took place in Alberta this past weekend. Another presentation took place in B.C.

From reports about those presentations, I have learned that in them Bishop Schultz makes an astounding declaration. He declares that homosexual behaviour is not sinful. Bishop Schultz sprinkles his presentation liberally with Biblical quotes. But, not surprisingly, there is not the slightest acknowledgement in his presentation that there is not only a general Scriptural context (e.g. Genesis 1-2) but also specific Scriptural passages (e.g. Romans 1, 1Cor. 6, Lev. 18, 20, etc.) that would counter his claim. He surely must be aware of such passages. It seems that he hopes that his listeners will not know that there are, and should they know, he will consider these passages to be irrelevant. His methodology seems to be typical of the politically orchestrated conversations about gay and lesbian sexuality that have taken place within the ELCIC during the past decade. And in conversations following these presentations, Bishop Schultz admitted that the ultimate goal of the gay-lesbian lobby is their approval for ordination.

When I consider the organizational structure and particularly much of the leadership within the ELCIC I can only despair. When I consider the many pastors who are actively promoting the adoption of same-sex blessings, particularly in the Eastern Synod, I can only despair. As one who is determined to retain the Scriptural and confessional integrity of the ELCIC I have to acknowledge that the trend seems irreversible. I wish we could, but the harsh reality is, we cannot reclaim the ELCIC.

However, my hope lies in God, and with the many Scripturally and confessionally grounded lay persons throughout the church who are beginning to take courage and voice their opposition against decisions that go counter to their understanding of the Scriptures as well as their personal convictions. You and I may not be able to reclaim our Synods or the ELCIC. But we can reclaim our congregations. And I would suspect that a large majority within many of those congregations are opposed to the direction that our church leadership is attempting to entice us.

This is a critical time not only for the ELCIC but also for each of our congregations. It's a time for boldness and courage. It's a time to reclaim the decision-making power and authority that rightly resides in the congregations. It's a time to speak up and to speak out. It's a time to reclaim our congregations and assert our congregational independence of the decisions of the larger church whose theology is at sharp variance with our own. May God bless and guide all our churches, as we turn to God, and each other, for courage and mutual support.