



**Oregon Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

Tuesday, October 11, 2011

Dear Friends and Members of the Oregon Synod,

This morning I attended a prayer breakfast at Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland. The event was hosted by "The Community of Welcoming Congregations" and was organized around support of the upcoming Marriage Equality legislation before the State of Oregon. I was one of eleven religious leaders asked to speak to the issue.

Marriage Equality is a civil government issue, not a church issue as such. Lutherans have called for just and fair treatment of gay and lesbian individuals in every statement we put out since the first LCA statement in 1970. Nonetheless, I know Marriage Equality legislation is not something all of us might favor. It is not something addressed directly in our current ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality.

Because of this I have declined to sign the Welcoming Congregations' [Faith Leader's Declaration of Support of the Freedom to Marry](#). I do not disagree with this statement personally, but feel it says more than ELCA Lutherans have agreed upon in our Social Statement process. As your bishop it is my practice to append my name only to documents which are wholly in line with agreed upon teachings of our church.

It is my judgment, however, that Marriage Equality is in the best interest of society as a whole, and I support it whole heartedly. I share with you here the comments I offered those attending the breakfast.

With joy,

Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke  
Oregon Synod – ELCA

**Comments for National Coming Out Day Breakfast  
Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland, OR  
October 11, 2011  
Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke, Oregon Synod, ELCA**

In the Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal, published in 1958 – the hymnal I grew up with – there is a prayer in the service of Marriage which follows the speaking of a couple's vows. It read, *"Almighty God, Creator of mankind, who only art the well-spring of life: Bestow upon these thy servants, if it be thy will, the gift and heritage of children; and grant that they may see their children brought up in thy faith and fear, to the honor and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

In 1978 Lutherans published a new hymnal, The Lutheran Book of Worship, in which this prayer no longer appeared. I don't remember anybody ever talking about this change. I don't know who decided to delete it, or why. It is a mystery.

In a world with almost 7 billion people on it, where safe and effective birth control is readily available, and in which many are choosing to delay or forego child bearing altogether, it is not hard to imagine why this prayer has fallen out of favor. Yet, we didn't talk about it, and one cannot eradicate in 50 years what humanity has assumed for well over 50 centuries. For most of us marriage and family are two sides of the same coin. This is certainly my understanding.

To suggest that the issue before us today is marriage "equality" is not saying enough if "equality" is understood, as it is by many, to mean simply fairness or sameness between gay and lesbian, and heterosexual people. Nor is it enough to suggest that "love" between two people, and the rights granted to individuals who marry, is our primary issue. Deep in our DNA and cultural patterns is a concern for the well-being of the whole tribe, the family, our mutual survivability - our children. However, to suggest that marriage and family means one man, one woman, and 2.5 children living in good health and happiness in a suburban home with a white picket fence is so inaccurate in our day and age as to actually be harmful to society. Our conversations about marriage and family must not be separated, and our assumptions about the marriage and family should not remain un-examined.

For example, it has never been the case that the only model of marriage is one man and one woman. It has never been the case that the only way a family might be blessed with the children is through the inception of those who will eventually be the child's legal guardians. Adoption has always existed. Surrogate parenting has always existed, and on the horizon is not only in-vitro fertilization, but cloning and genetic engineering as well.

Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and third gender people have always parented, through traditional, opposite sex marriages; as loving aunts and uncles; as servants or nannies; as single, adoptive parents; or today as married or committed couples. This is why I am here to support marriage equality. I support marriage equality for the well-being of families, for the common good and for the health of society as a whole.

We know things today we did not used to know. We know human sexual identity is a wonderfully complex and diverse reality. We know a significant number of people in this world are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or third gender. Not all of us flourish in emotionally or physically intimate, opposite gender relationships. Some prefer to be single, some are strongest in same gender relationships - and the diversity of who we are has always parented our children in any number of different configurations.

Seeing as our culture has long ago recognized that gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and third gender people can make at least as effective and caring parents as heterosexual people; and seeing as adoption, regular birth, surrogate parenting and in-vitro fertilization are available to all; and in light of the fact that our society continues to use marriage laws, and their protections and benefits, as a major, stabilizing force for the support and care of families; I consider it morally wrong to withhold from gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or third gender couples the right to marry. The restriction protects nobody and hurts everybody. Marriage Equality is needed because marriage is not just about two people - it is about all of us together.