



# Northeastern Ohio Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

[Galatians 3:28]

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you are already aware, on Friday, June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that marriage between two people of the same gender is now a fundamental right in every state. That includes Ohio, where until yesterday, same-sex marriages were not legal.

Many of you are wondering what this means for us and our Lutheran congregations in Northeastern Ohio. The first thing I would suggest is that we consider it as an opportunity to enter into discussions with each other, listening respectfully to those whose opinion may differ from yours. As a church we are not of the same mind on this issue, yet we are loved equally by a God who created us and holds us all in God's tender embrace.

In 2009, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted a social statement entitled, "[Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust](#)." If you have never read it, I would urge you to do so. In that statement, this church calls for mutual respect and for guidance that seeks the good of all. As we live together with disagreement, the people in this church will continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.

The statement also challenges us as people of God to welcome and support families, regardless of their makeup, and to take great care to support whatever creates and sustains families as a foundation and support of trust. It is acknowledged that this may be difficult for some congregations. But above all, consider the words of the apostle Paul: "*If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*" [Romans 12:18]

For pastors, keep in mind that the ELCA has no policy or rite on same-gender marriages. You are free to perform same-gender weddings, and you are also under no obligation to do so. If you choose to perform same-gender weddings, it is advisable to observe all the policies that you and your congregation have already established for heterosexual couples, such as pre-marital counseling and the like. You and your council may want to review those policies and adapt them to accommodate those same-gender couples who wish to be married in your church. The church still believes that marriage is a sacred trust that calls the couple to mutual accountability, regardless of gender.

As we live into this new reality, let us seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and also bear in mind the words of the letter to the Ephesians: "*But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*" [Ephesians 4:15, 25, 32]

Please call our office for any resources which may be helpful to you and I am also available for any further discussion you wish to have.

Peace and Blessings,

The Rev. Abraham D. Allende  
Bishop