

Marriage Law and the Protection of Congregations' Religious Liberty

June 26, 2015

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who declares, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18)

Contrary to Jesus' authority and teaching about marriage that affirms the Father's intention in creation, the decision by a majority of the justices of the United States Supreme Court today to legalize same-sex marriage in all 50 states is tragic, but not surprising. Many Americans live with the arrogance and delusion that contemporary wisdom makes our understanding superior to the revealed truth of God's Word. In this context the high court's ruling redefines relationships and marriage as a right preserved as a matter of human "dignity." Such dignity is based on an individual determination of fulfillment and morality without regard to external truth or teachings that preserve the greater good of all society. The Supreme Court has foolishly endorsed this idolatry.

The Supreme Court may have the power to dictate what state governments must claim to be marriage, but it most certainly does not have the power to change what God has revealed to be true marriage, an integral part of His plan for human life which is inherent in the order of the world He has created.

God alone knows the long-term consequences of the decision for our nation. Now Christians who uphold the orthodox Christian faith and confess that God alone defines marriage must be bold to confess the truth of God's Word without regard to the consequences. The North American Lutheran Church will not shrink from the challenge and the opportunity this decision provides. Both our message and our life become even more distinguishable from the confused and misguided state of our cultural context. To that end we will be providing resources to equip all our congregations and pastors to confront an idolatrous culture and government.

Our first response must be one of prayer and careful deliberation. There is no need to panic about each congregation's right to continue to practice Christian marriage. NALC congregations and pastors can legally continue to teach, preach and practice our confession:

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman. (Common Confession 6, Marriage and Family)

A few of our leaders with knowledge of the law and the rights of churches to exercise religious liberty have prepared a helpful guide, "Marriage Law and the Protection of Congregations' Religious Liberty." We encourage you to carefully read it and then review your governing documents and policies to ensure that you are consistently in line with our confession of the Christian faith.

The guide is self-explanatory and should be sufficient for congregations charting their way through the turbulent waters in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision. However, if you need help, NALC members with legal backgrounds have volunteered to assist our congregations with these important matters.

Let us pray all the more fervently that our Lord will shield and protect families, and especially children, from the destructive impact of redefining marriage to be whatever sinful human beings desire. Let us not forget that we are bound to follow the One who possesses even greater authority, the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. One day every knee will bend and every tongue confess that He alone is Lord. For us, there is no other option except an obedient response to His Word and His authority.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. John F. Bradosky, Bishop
The Rev. Mark C. Chavez, General Secretary
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