

A Profession of the MCSA's Unity and Diversity Within the Context of the Church's Conversation on Same-Sex Relationships

Preamble

The 2010 Conference issued a directive that required concrete suggestions to be brought "...to the 2012 Conference as to how the MCSA can create space for [our] divergence of conviction [about same-sex relationships] to be exercised in ways that will preserve the integrity and unity of the church" (*Yearbook 2011*, Resolution 2.27, p106). The 2012 Conference extended this directive "...for an additional period of two years until the Conference of 2014" (*Yearbook 2013*, Resolution 30, p.84).

In response to this Conference directive, DEWCOM offers a further suggestion of a way in which the divergence of conviction within the MCSA on this issue can be expressed that will help to preserve the integrity and unity of the church. It comprises a profession of faith that gives voice to the differing and even contradictory views on this issue that are held within the MCSA, whilst affirming that within this divergence there is much that we hold in common that binds us together as one.

Motivation

Some of the reasons for adopting a profession of faith of this nature would include the following:

- The provision of a form of words that honestly acknowledges the differing viewpoints within the MCSA on same-sex relationships that can be professed together within services of worship by those holding such differing views will surely strengthen the MCSA's witness as a church committed to unity in the face of difficult difference. It will remind all of us that we remain bound together within the one body of Christ with others who hold different views on this issue from our own, and that such costly togetherness is one of the distinctive gifts we can offer the world that is so familiar with narrow sectarianism, prejudice and intolerance. Historically, the various creeds and professions of faith of the Church have functioned as focal expressions of the Church's essential unity, articulating the guiding convictions of the Church's faith and helping to shape the Church's life. In a similar way, the profession of faith suggested below is intended to give expression to the MCSA's essential unity in the midst of the potentially divisive divergence within the same-sex conversation.
- One of the concerns felt by some on both sides of the same-sex debate is that they will be identified with the contrary views of others within the church on this issue. The profession of unity and diversity suggested below makes it clear that within the MCSA there are differing beliefs that are held within the MCSA on this issue, so that no-one should be judged based on the convictions and articulations of others.
- This profession of our unity and diversity within this conversation will give concrete expression to the conviction that how we hold our beliefs is every bit as important as the beliefs themselves. If our convictions are expressed in arrogant, judgmental and domineering ways, then regardless of what we believe there will be nothing of Christ evident in us. But if our convictions are expressed with humility, selflessness and compassion, respectfully recognizing the perspectives of others, then the Spirit of Christ will be seen in us even though there may be inadequacies in the content of our particular theological understandings.

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We believe in one God who created all things in love and for love, who has ordered the world so that life in all its fullness can be enjoyed by all.

We believe in Jesus Christ who embodies the whole presence of God before humanity and the whole presence of humanity before God. In loving obedience to God he endured the injustice of the cross, so that through his death and resurrection all people can be freed from sin to live whole and holy lives.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who enlivens the church in every generation to discover afresh what it means to be the one body of Christ given in love for the world.

We believe that all people have been created in the image of God and that every man, woman and child is a person of sacred worth with the capacity for great love. Yet, each one of us has fallen short of God's intention for our lives and is in need of God's saving grace.

We believe that our deepest identity as the children of God is affirmed in our baptism as we are claimed as God's own to partner God in the work of new creation within the world.

We believe in the authority of Scripture and that the Divine revelation contained therein is the supreme rule of our faith and practice.

Among us are those who believe that the Bible is clear in its condemnation of all homosexual acts as contrary to the will of God. Also among us are those who believe that the Bible does not condemn all homosexual acts, namely those between two consenting adults in a mutually loving, faithful and committed relationship.

Among us are those who believe that the biblical norm for marriage is between one man and one woman only and that any deviation from this pattern is against the express will of God. Also among us are those who believe that God's primary concern is for the quality of our loving, and that two people of the same gender who truly love each other can enter into the bonds of marriage with the blessing of God and the church.

Among us are those who believe that those in loving, faithful and committed same-sex relationships can serve as leaders of the church and be ordained as ministers of the gospel. Also among us are those who believe that those in such relationships cannot serve in these ways.

All of us believe that the church is called to be a community of love and not rejection with a responsibility to extend pastoral care to all people irrespective of their sexual orientation, and that no-one should be excluded from any aspect of the church's life and ministry solely on the basis of their sexual orientation.

We believe that any form of victimisation, hatred or violence towards homosexual people should be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

We believe that there is far more that binds us together than what divides us, and that not even our different convictions on this issue need compromise the essential unity that is ours in Christ.

We believe that the grace of God is such that even in the shortcomings that are ours as people, we can still point others to the great truth of the unconditional love of God that Christ has made known and the Spirit has brought near.