



SHEPHERD
OF THE HILLS
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

Pastor
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Dear Friends in Christ,

As you are most likely aware, the California Supreme Court issued a ruling legalizing same-gender marriages. Shepherd of the Hills rejoices in this new development in our state, which we hope will promote greater equality for all Californians. This legal development has also prompted discussion of our options as a Reconciling in Christ congregation.

It is important to remember that the Lutheran tradition does not deem marriage a sacrament. Lutherans regard marriage as a civil institution governed by state laws. A pastor officiating at a marriage does so both as an officer of the state and as an ordained minister, providing for both the legal requirements of marriage and the blessings of God and the wider community for the couple being married.

We have recently received a letter from our outgoing and newly elected bishops reviewing the Sierra Pacific Synod's position on same-gender marriage. A copy of the letter can be found on the bulletin board at the back of the church. In essence, the letter acknowledges that many congregations will follow their own path regarding same-gender marriage. And, although the ELCA, the larger Lutheran body to which we belong, does not sanction same-gender marriages, churches and pastors within our synod that choose to perform these weddings are unlikely to face outside interference, even though there are theoretical disciplinary actions on the books.

The Sierra Pacific Synod passed a resolution in 1990 affirming the right of all Americans to marry, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples. In 2007 delegates at the National Assembly of the ELCA voted to strongly endorse restraint in disciplining congregations and pastors who work towards full inclusion of GLBT persons in our churches. The outgoing and newly elected bishops of our synod have stated that they do not intend to bring charges against Lutheran pastors in our synod who officiate at same-gender marriages.

Beyond disciplinary issues, Shepherd of the Hills sees endorsing same-gender marriages part of our Christian call. Shepherd of the Hills is a congregation that welcomes all people, as Jesus welcomed all people. We officially state our position as a safe and welcoming church for sexual minorities through membership in the Reconciling in Christ program. We see providing for the legal marriage of sexual minority persons as one way in which we extend Christ's grace to all. Pr. Katie will continue her practices of engaging all couples in pre-marital counseling as appropriate to the situation, conducting weddings as Christian services, and avoiding ceremonies as media events, whether the couples be of the same or opposite genders.

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If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding Shepherd of the Hill's response to the legalization of same-gender marriage, please call Pr. Katie at church (510-524-8281) or talk to any council member.

In Peace,

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Pr. Katie Hines-Shah and Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church Council

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