

My sisters and brothers,

As soon as I walked out of the convention hall following the votes on ministry policies, the reporter from the The Washington Times grabbed me and asked if I would share how I voted.

You may see her article in the morning or Sunday.

I wanted you to know of my vote, then, and why I voted as I did, because though I sought to explain it to her, whatever I say will be reduced to a short sentence. All of you know how verbose I am and one sentence won't do it!

Earlier this week, I sought to place a strong paragraph within the social statement to speak to the normative nature of marriage between a husband and wife and connecting it with the bearing of the children. It failed, but I believe that we as a church need to firmly establish marriage between a man and a woman and the possible added blessing of bearing children and raising them in the faith, to be the foundational tree of life for society and the church.

But when I looked at the proposed resolution that spoke to 'finding ways for those congregations who could, to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable those desiring a life long monogamous relationship,' I felt that to vote against this would be false to what I had written earlier to you all. In that earlier writing, I spoke to my thinking that the strength of the great foundational tree, could hold others who sought to build their nests within the sheltering branches of the tree.

I do think that we should find ways through pastoral care and conversation to recognize those among us who have been baptized and who have been strong members and leaders within our congregations who are in a same sex relationship because they believe they cannot do otherwise. I think that they should receive pastoral care and support. I believe that we should find ways to recognize their presence within the congregation, particularly if they are leaders and if we are gladly receiving their pledges, gifts, bequests, and counting on their weekly presence. To my way of thinking, if this recognition and support in the community of Christ leads to a life long monogamous relationship, so be it. If it leads to a transformation of life, so be it.

The church council did not define 'publicly accountable' which kept me thinking of ways that I might as a pastor with pastoral care might speak to a couple about keeping their relationship publicly accountable with me and the community, asking for their commitment to share their ongoing joys and concerns in their relationship with me, as their pastor.

So I voted for this resolution. [It received a 60% majority vote.]

I did not vote for the rostering resolution. The candidacy process and the call process have been up this point a churchwide process. The installation of a pastor has used the

text from I Timothy, “set an example for the flock.” I am not ready to vote for this second resolution, on the very same day of the former resolution. I believe we need time to process this first vote, to talk about finding ways, to hear conversations within synod council, deans, leadership support, the gathering of the ministerium. The implications of the first vote need to be seen before we move to the rostering question, in my mind.

I also spoke to the reporter who was asking me about those who would not be in favor of this vote. I shared with her that the social statement spoke to people having at least four stances on this matter of homosexuality, and that many would not find total agreement with the votes.

I spoke to the story of Elijah in I Kings 19, where Elijah finds himself feeling all alone, while the still small voice of crushed silence reveals that there are 7000 who would be like minded. In our synod and across the church, there are many partners with us and for us in whatever place we find ourselves. Our pastoral conferences can allow places for discussion; colleagues in other denominations; colleagues across the church; I am available for conversation beginning Monday.

I know that this Sunday may have a number of members confused and wondering what this will mean for their congregation and church.

The bishops were told that Bishop Mark Hanson will be sending out a letter on Saturday that you will receive by email that may be shared with the congregation on Sunday. Let his words be the guiding word about what has happened at the assembly. His view from the whole ELCA will be the best word for this Sunday.

I will offer a summary for you on Monday from my perspective.

I simply wanted you to hear from me prior to your members speaking to an article they had read quoting me with you having nothing to respond with.

We have a wonderful group of Virginians here!

God bless you in your ministry. I keep you in my prayers and give thanks for your robust pastoral ministry and care.

Jim