

JUN 22 REC'D

# Community of Christ

June 19, 2009

Welcoming Community Network Committee  
Fort Collins Community of Christ

Jon and Nancy Mendenhall  
Dick and Julie Foster  
Dave and Voni Simons  
Rick and Kay Bunch  
Betty Jones  
Tom Beck and Max Coopwood  
Kathy Bridwell  
Shirley Remmenga  
Bob and Sharon Fulton  
Steve and Bonnie Thomas  
Sharon Troyer

Dear Friends:

The Presidency has received your letter expressing your feelings about the current church policy on same-sex marriage. Thank you for taking the time to communicate your perspectives. We understand your comments as your contribution to the continuing discussion about this issue throughout the worldwide church.

The Presidency is acutely aware of the pain and frustration of individuals and groups who view same-sex marriage from various personal, scriptural, theological, legal, and sacramental perspectives. Matters of human sexuality are so deeply ingrained in our individual, social, and cultural identities that it is difficult to separate examination of issues from our fundamental sense of self. Because preserving one's sense of identity is a fundamental need of human beings, consideration of sexuality, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage easily becomes emotionally charged and conflicted. Further, exploration of such issues in an international community of faith, with the added complexities of diverse cultural customs and languages, must be done with great care, understanding, and sensitivity.

It is important for all involved in this discussion to remember that direction in the life of the church emerges through the dynamic interaction of scripture, tradition, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community. This interaction occurs in the context of an international faith community. Intercultural critique of existing and proposed direction is an important part of this process and often is overlooked by those

who hold strong opinions on certain issues, especially if they are from the traditionally dominant, individualistic (western) cultures of the church. Some international church leaders are greatly concerned that these dominant cultures will decide the question of same-sex marriage and related issues without adequately considering their voices and perspectives.

The Expanded World Church Leadership Council, after completing the “We Share” foundational document, has begun to discuss “culturally respectful standards of conduct,” including issues related to human sexuality. In that council, we discovered that it takes much patience, sensitivity, and effort to understand perspectives and to seek common ground. For example, the word “homosexuality” has multiple definitions, meanings, and connotations across the cultures of the church. We are continuing to work on a commonly held definition that we can use in our discussions. Also, in some nations, if our ministers are linked to a church that has positions on homosexuality that are contrary to governmental positions, their well-being could be jeopardized. These are just a few of the complexities we are dealing with.

Of course, the first step in resolving difficult issues is to establish a common base of understanding about the current situation. The recent statement of the Presidency was in response to inquiries about the current policy and its background. It was not a new policy statement or a different interpretation of the statement. The statement was provided as information to the church because many were saying that they did not know what the policy was. We also stated that the current policy is being reviewed by the appropriate leadership bodies (Presidency, Standing High Council, and World Church Leadership Council) in terms of its adequacy for current situations.

Abiding by current official policy is a matter of leadership integrity, especially in light of the 2002 WCLC statement, “Community, Common Consent, and Homosexuality.” This statement promised the church in response to a related matter (homosexuality and ordination) that there would not be further exceptions to the guidelines unless they are adjusted through the “common consent” of the people. This statement of principle was necessitated by the church’s reaction to the realization that church officers had not abided by the policy about homosexual ordination in a growing number of instances.

An important part of being in community is learning to talk about divisive issues without dividing. When one side thinks the other side already has made up its mind and will do what it wants regardless of current policies, it becomes very difficult—if not impossible—to have productive dialogue. Any change in the policy will need to occur through a process that incorporates the steps of effective dialogue and decision-making in community that includes respect for the principle of “common consent.” The goal is to have a process of deliberation that is perceived, regardless of the outcome, as fair by those who have differing view.

To bring this to a focus, we are aware of legislation coming to the 2010 World Conference about same-sex marriage, particularly in relation to WCR 1182. To allow ministers in some parts of the world to ignore church policy before consideration of this

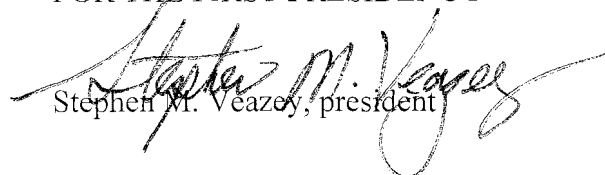
legislation seems to us to be a disenfranchisement of the World Conference from actions it may or may not choose to take. This is where we need more clarification about your perspectives. Are you suggesting that the Presidency simply should change the policy - without allowing for the processes of deliberation and “common consent” to work in the life of the church?

Also, ignoring the current policy would create a confusing administrative situation in the church. If some ministers are allowed to ignore the policy on same-sex marriage, then should others be allowed to ignore church policies that they do not agree with? How do we decide which policies can be ignored by individuals and which are to be respected? These are not hypothetical questions, but ones that continue to be raised with us.

We are aware of the content of all the references, articles, and quotes which you lift up in your letter. All of these statements are directed to the church as a whole. Church members are obviously at different places in their understanding of the implications and application to the church’s life of various Words of Counsel and leadership statements. We also are reminded that we have been counseled as a church to “Listen together to one another without judgment or predisposition. Do not assume that the answers to matters of conflict have yet been perceived. There is much labor to be done. Reason together in love, and the Spirit of truth will prevail.” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:5c.)

Once again, thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives. We hope that the reflections above are helpful to you and others as we work together to resolve difficult issues in the life of the church. We appreciate your leadership, ministry, and support.

FOR THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

  
Stephen M. Veazey, president

CC First Presidency  
Apostle Dale Luffman  
David Nii, assistant to the apostle  
Tim Ashburn, President, Rocky Mountain Mission Center