

Open Letter to the Danish National Church

A pastoral letter for guidance, consolation and hope for congregations in a religious upheaval

The occasion for this letter is the Folketing's adoption of the new law on gender-neutral marriage and the development by the Danish National Church bishops of a wedding rite for homosexuals. This letter is sent by the boards of the following ecclesial movements and organizations:

- Danish Bible Institute
- Danish Oasis
- Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society
- Evangelical Lutheran Network
- Inner Mission
- Ecclesial Assembly for Bible and Confession (KSSB)
- The Christian Federation of Students
- Lutheran Mission
- Congregation Faculty (Menighedsfakultetet)

We comment:

With the introduction of a wedding rite for homosexuals, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is in a historic crisis. It is urgent in this situation to give spiritual guidance and exhibit theological leadership. To facilitate this, the senders of this pastoral letter sought unity among various organizations and movements that on this matter share a deep concern for the condition of the Danish National Church and a great hope in the Church's Lord.

We want to emphasize that we do not wish to contribute to condemnation of homosexuals in our churches and our society. Rather, we want our congregations increasingly to become communities where people with homosexual orientation and feelings find a home and a sanctuary in the middle of life's circumstances and the challenges of discipleship.

At the same time it is essential for us to emphasize that the church has no mandate to bless or institute a homosexual relationship as a marriage. A wedding rite for homosexuals brings the church into conflict with the church's foundation as expressed in the four classic marks that characterize the global Christian Church's confession: one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Church UNITY is threatened because the rite isolates the Danish National Church from most of Christendom in both past and present, which would not recognize the theological legitimacy of this ritual.

The Church's HOLINESS is threatened because the rite blesses what the Bible calls sin. Thus license to sin is preached, rather than forgiveness of sins, and this so-called gospel is not a Gospel.

The Church's CATHOLICITY is threatened because the rite is contrary to biblical creation theology and simultaneously redefines what has been recognized as marriage through cultural history and experience, even in non-Christian cultures.

The Church's APOSTOLIC tradition is threatened because the rite cuts off the Danish National Church from the apostolic tradition on this question: Paul, Church Fathers, Luther et al.

We have sought in vain to avoid this situation in which some of the bishops, as the National Church's highest leaders and shepherds, are paving the way for this rite. Now we regret this situation and we will openly note that we regard it as a major and serious failure of the Danish National Church's spiritual leaders. We also express our support for those bishops who have tried to avoid this situation.

In this situation, we choose various responses. Some choose to remain in the parish, others form worshiping fellowships and retain membership within the Danish National Church, others resign from the National Church and go into independent congregations and other church bodies. We would urge that we set each other's consciences free and acknowledge the different roads we will travel in the future, when we try to be the truth in love. And let us insist that we are still in fellowship on what is essential: The Church's Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and the Apostolic tradition, as is attested in the Bible and the Evangelical Lutheran confessions.

Let us see each other's choices as different sides of the same need, the same struggle, the same ember, the same joy. Let us strive for cohesion and love and let us continue from each of our standpoints to lift the flag high for a genuine, Spirit-filled gospel, and the dissemination of this gospel among our people. Let us not let the current emergency take away our courage or strength to do what we are called to do under all circumstances: preach the gospel of the Cross and practice the Resurrection life. This has always held all of God's greatest promises in itself.

If God is faithful and has all power in heaven and on earth, then we shall straighten our backs and look to the bright future. The future is in any event God's.

May God be gracious to our people and have mercy upon the people's church!