

A call for participation, learning, prayer and expressing Christ's love

on the topic of offering marriage or blessings to all couples regardless of sexual orientation at Gloria Dei

Note: the themes below came from the Welcoming Community Teams review of the Implications Wheel posters created in September 2002 and from many conversations with Gloria Dei membership and leadership. These are not presented in priority order. We present these themes to create a call to the membership of Gloria Dei; to all committees of the congregation; and to the pastoral, staff and lay leadership, to join in participating, learning, praying, and focusing on Christ's love in working together for a successful vote in May 2003.

--The Welcoming Community Team, November, 2002

Emergent themes:

- 1. Our single most important focus as a congregation is the gospel of Christ's love for us poured out in our baptism. Beyond that, we are not and do not look to become a "single issue" congregation.**

Gloria Dei is a congregation that is known for its work in many ministry areas and for its social advocacy on many levels. We are well known for our liturgical and sacramental worship, our rich music, our popular Vacation Bible School and programs for children, and our outreach ministries. Our Mission statement and Welcoming Statement attract new members and inspire us to live out our baptism as we intentionally welcome all people. Gloria Dei is made up of many communities. The Implications Wheel described a conviction that we are large enough to embrace the full diversity of our community and to support a wide range of ministries.

Rather than focus solely on one debate or topic ("a spotlight on one voice") we hope to continue to "shine a floodlight" on many voices and ministries. The Implications Wheel revealed a worry about the conversation becoming contentious or divisive.

There is a concern about media and community attention which may occur as we approach our vote on blessings of same sex couples.

The Welcoming Community Team calls on all Gloria Dei members, committees, teams, and leadership to promote the inclusive ministry spirit of Gloria Dei.

- 2. Legal process vs. Relationship blessing**

Several members have asked for clarity regarding the words "marriage and blessing" from a legal point of view. How does the church understand these words?

Several requested seeing examples of blessing and marriage services. What is done at other ELCA congregations? What might Gloria Dei offer?

3. Offer scriptural discussions and educational sessions

Many people are looking for theological implications of our decision. What does the bible really say? What is the Lutheran perspective on weddings, blessings, same-sex couples?

Participants encouraged the congregation

- to provide ongoing opportunities for learning and discussion before and after any decisions on this issue.
- to assist parents in communicating with their children regarding this issue.
- to encourage youth (high school age) involvement in the discussion.

4. Christ's love for all people draws Gloria Dei into welcoming all and to intentionally work on living out our Welcoming Statement through respect, love and community.

People may feel vulnerable discussing sexuality in general, and this topic in particular.

Several members expressed fear that parts of the congregation may stay away from this discussion. This may cause an undercurrent of discontent. A lack of participation of the whole community may mean that the issue will resurface later.

We encourage all members to participate in the learning, conversation and the vote, and not to abdicate the responsibilities we have as members of this community of Christ.

5. Intentionally build deeper relationships between and throughout the membership of Gloria Dei.

So many of our opinions and attitudes are shaped by our relationships with each other. When we share personal stories and journeys of faith with each other, we grow in faith and awareness.

We hope to create faith-full spaces where questions and conversation can occur between members in large groups, small groups and one-on-one conversations, so that we might better understand each other.

All of Gloria Dei is called to participate, learn, pray and work to express Christ's love as we work as a community to understand and support one another in this call to consider broadening our worship ministry.