

The Way Things Look From Here

"A Shift in Our Culture"

January 11, 2015

Pastor Vern Christopherson

In the January newsletter I wrote in *The Way Things Look from Here* about the Zumbro Church Council's plan to enter into a time of decision-making regarding same-gender weddings at Zumbro. I shared in the article a recap of our journey over the last five years. I also shared that four additional articles would appear weekly beginning January 11. The purpose of these articles is to provide some context for our conversations over the next month, and especially for the conversation at the annual meeting on Sunday, Feb. 8.

As you know, there is a sea change going on in our culture regarding same-gender marriage. It is now possible for same-gender couples to get married in 36 states. The majority of the moves at the state level have been the result of court decisions, some have been the result of actions by state legislatures, and a few the result of popular vote. Because of conflicting rulings in court decisions, the United States Supreme Court will probably need to get involved in the matter.

What are we to make of this shift in policy? That's one of the key questions for us at Zumbro. Certainly there is a wide range of opinions within our membership. Some are concerned about the moral fiber of our nation. Others are saying, "It's the right thing to do." Still others are in the middle, doing their best to sort through the conflicting arguments. In the midst of these competing opinions, there is the additional influence of the culture at large. If opinion polls are accurate, the culture is increasingly open to, and accepting of, same-gender marriage.

Just because the culture is changing, of course, doesn't mean that performing same-gender weddings is a foregone conclusion at Zumbro. Christianity has always had a sense of being "in the world but not of the world." So, for instance, we don't elevate the importance of money or power or status just because our culture might pull us in that direction. No, we look for guidance both in the Bible and our faith tradition in an effort to do the right thing. Hopefully this guidance proves helpful as we strive to make decisions about important issues.

The church might be *in the world but not of the world*, but that doesn't mean we can bury our heads in the sand. Ever since Pentecost, the church has had to wrestle with tough social issues: whether to eat meat that had first been sacrificed to a pagan idol; whether followers of Jesus should go to war; whether the church should take a stand on capital punishment. Wrestling with these issues has always been divisive and has threatened the unity of the church.

The church might be in the world but not of the world, but that also doesn't mean we're supposed to speak an automatic no to every new thing that comes our way. We believe that God continues to speak, even beyond the pages of Scripture. If the church were to automatically say no to new issues, the Gentiles (us) would not have been allowed into the church, we might still have slavery, and divorced people might continue to be treated as second-class citizens.

In all these issues, the Bible has been our starting point, but the task of discernment has never been as simple as picking out a few select verses and applying them in wooden fashion. On the contrary, these verses have to be read and interpreted with the rest of Scripture in mind. And beyond that, those reading them have to be listening to see if God might be up to something new.

continued on back of page

Where does this leave us regarding same-gender weddings? I wish I had an easy answer. About all I can say for sure is that well-meaning Christians end up on different sides of the issue. If church history is any indication, finding a way forward is often challenging. Still, I continue to be hopeful. Just as Christ broke down the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile and helped them find a way forward, Christ can break down our walls and help us find a way forward too.

Please pray for our church as we go through this process. We will not be of one mind but, with God's help, we can be committed to finding the best way forward.

Upcoming articles in *The Way Things Look from Here*:

January 18 – Not an “Issue” but a Person

January 25 – Making Difficult Decision in the Church

February 1 – What the Bible Has to Say about Homosexuality