

The Way Things Look From Here

"Still Engaged in Discernment"

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March 15, 2015

Pastor Vern Christopherson

I want to give you an update on the discernment process for same-gender weddings at Zumbro. By voice vote of the congregation at the annual meeting, the decision was left in the hands of the church council. A main reason we didn't take a yes-no vote at the meeting is because the council felt we needed the support of a "significant majority" of the congregation to go forward in this area. In other words, a vote of 51-49% might be a decision of sorts, but it would leave us hopelessly divided as a congregation.

The church council has had two meetings since the annual meeting. The issue was discussed at length at both meetings. The council also held two Listening Posts to invite further conversation. Finally, Council President Mark Larson (larson.mark2@mayo.edu) and I (pastorvern@zumbrolutheran.org) have received a variety of emails and communications from members of the congregation. The council has carefully discussed the feedback and spent much time in prayer asking for God's guidance.

Clearly this is not easy work. In the midst of the process, know that the council is firmly committed to giving people every opportunity to express themselves.

What have we been hearing? From those in favor of same-gender weddings, we've heard things like: "I fully support the decision." "These poor people have suffered long enough." "I wasn't in favor at first, but as I've listened to people's stories, especially those with gay family members, I'm more open than I used to be." "In a world in which people regularly discriminate against gays and lesbians, this action would be one of incredible welcome and support."

From those not in favor of same-gender weddings, we've heard things like: "I'm not against gays and lesbians, but I struggle with calling it 'marriage.'" "I'd be more comfortable if people got married at the justice of the peace, and then came and worshipped with us." "This is beyond anything I ever imagined—what's happening to the world around us?" "The Bible clearly says it's wrong."

As I mentioned in my last edition of *The Way Things Look from Here*, we will never be of one accord on this issue. Still, I firmly believe we can continue to be the church together, just like we were the church together before the annual meeting. Over the last 150 years, there have been a whole host of issues on which the people of Zumbro have not agreed. Those disagreements did not make Zumbro any less of a church. In whatever situation, our unity comes from Christ and the mission we share, not from our agreement on any particular issue.

There have been a couple of concerns raised since the annual meeting. One is that the weather wasn't very good on the morning of February 8. There was a thin coating of ice that made it difficult for some to get out. For those who missed the meeting, you still have a chance to share your thoughts with the council. Fill out a green *opinion card* that's available either at the ushers' stand or in the church office. You can return it by sealing it in a yellow *Life at Zumbro* envelope and placing it in the offering basket. Know that your opinion is an important part of the discernment process.

A second concern has been raised as well: Were the 250 people at the meeting enough to make this decision? It's harder to respond to this concern. While we would always like as many people as possible to attend our meetings, one of the realities of being the church is that we have to do the church's work with whoever shows up. By way of comparison, this was the best attended congregational meeting during my time at Zumbro, including the meetings in which we called pastors and rostered staff.

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At its last meeting, the church council discussed the possibility of reopening the spectrum ballot. They decided against it. There would be no way to safeguard the integrity of the process. That's when the council decided to offer an *opinion card* instead. Please consider filling out a card, especially if you were not able to be with us at the annual meeting.

The council will be collecting these opinion cards through Sunday, Apr. 19. Then the council will gather sometime that week and make a final decision. I would ask you to pray for the council in its work. Once the decision is made, I will write an edition of *The Way Things Look from Here*. We will post it on the church website and also make it available as a handout at church.

One final thought: I will be sharing my perspective on this discernment process in my sermon on Sunday, Apr. 19. While I care very much about this decision, I care just as much, if not more, about what happens to us in the process. There are strong ties and deep friendships in this church. There is important work for us to continue to do, not the least of which is *building bridges of understanding and peace*. Whatever else you do in the coming month, ask God to fill each one of the members of Zumbro with respect, patience, and love.