

The Dodoma Statement: Lutherans in Tanzania Speak Out Against Homosexuality Decisions of ELCA

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania adopted a statement regarding decisions being made about homosexuality by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other world Lutheran churches. The statement was posted by the church to the Internet this week. Here is it.

THE DODOMA STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT hereinafter), thanks GOD that in His immeasurable wisdom, and through His Son Jesus Christ, all believers worldwide have been joined as one body; thus, making us be in communion. In this way, we can walk together to prosper in God's mission.

1.2 In our relationship as one body, we have co-operated in many and varied ways through both trying and undemanding issues. We were able to hold together all this time because of God's favor, and also through our unrelenting devotion in the entire Church, in regular services, where we confess the Creed and believe in God's Church as being One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic. Therefore any action in any church which is abnormal and non-conforming to the received and affirmed position and teachings of the church over the centuries in the whole Church of God, will inevitably produce shock and varied reaction from other churches around the world.

1.3 Currently, one such abnormal incidence, as viewed by ELCT, is the one associated with some churches – especially in Europe and America – deciding to accept same-sex marriages. The respective churches give several reasons in an effort to justify their decisions; and here we briefly make mention of only a few of such reasons.

1.3.1 They claim that church teachings on marriage, according to the Holy Scripture, are directed *to* “man and woman” – giving them room to decide; as opposed to the age-old interpretation, meaning that marriage is only *for* “man and woman”. In this way they erode the foundation, bit by bit, to weaken the authentic Biblical truth that marriage is between “man and woman” only. They introduce these “*new and misguided*” interpretations which negate long-held Church teachings and understanding of the Word of God dating from time immemorial. Some of the verses in the Bible that fall prey to the pundits and supporters of same-sex marriages are as follows: Gen.1: 27-28, 2:24; Mt.19:5-6a; Rom.1:26-27a and Gal.3:28.

1.3.2 And that, what is essential in marriage or other forms of matrimony is **love**. Provided the two love each other, they claim, such

relationship is correct and legal.

1.3.3 And that the circumstances nowadays, they claim; are different from conditions and settings in biblical times as regards what is, and what is not legal in love and marriage. They further claim that the question of values, virtues and morals changes with time, places and circumstances. Such claims distort what is classified as **sin** to depend on where and how it is committed. In this connection they want the whole Church to adopt their view regarding love and marriage especially between same sex partners as having evolved over time. Furthermore, they claim that the church is not changing with the times; and that it is “old-fashioned” to reproach and reprimand same-sex lovers and proponents. They insist that the whole Church should shake up and move with the times, like them, in the contemporary circumstances!

1.3.4 They further claim that, marriage laws in the countries where same sex marriages are taking place have changed so much that churches in those countries would have been in dire straits if they did not follow suit to the changed laws. It is our understanding that churches in these countries fear the backlash from political or authoritative vendetta. This will imply that churches in those countries might lose their perks with authorities if they continued in this stance – refusing and rejecting legalization of same-sex marriages.

1.3.5 They further claim that the issue of relationships – marriage, love-making and other forms of copulation – is the prerogative of the affected two individuals. And that they are free to make their own decisions in these matters; and should be left alone to do so – thereby stressing personal freedom as the virtue. So, there are many reasons such as enumerated above that have surfaced through word of mouth, writings and even actions from the churches that have legalized same-sex marriages.

2. THE COUNTER POSITION

2.1 Regarding these views from the same-sex marriage supporters/proponents, the ELCT does not accept any reasons whatsoever of legalizing such marriages.

2.2 This Church, (ELCT), stands firmly on the foundation of the **Word of God**; that marriage is as taught in the Bible through the texts described in section **1.3.1** above. These texts are being given perverse interpretations, which we cannot accept. All of us in this church, and elsewhere in the world, who reject same-sex marriages, believe that the Bible is self interpreting; and does not need imposition and wishes according to certain people, certain place, or certain authority. Holy Scripture is accurate, fixed and unchangeable.

2.3 This church firmly believes that love is the basis for relationship and real marital union between two lovers. Nevertheless in Holy matrimony this love is between two people of opposite sex. In addition, ELCT recognizes that the subject of love is very broad, and that there are

specific values involved in the divine attributes of love and loving. That is why, if taken lightly, it could lead to ideological acceptances and varied use of love to implicate, accept and legalize marriages that neither the Bible, nor society has countenanced over the years. If such a situation were to develop, and be allowed to flourish; then the Church and society may soon find itself in a complicated scenario in which it would be difficult to disentangle – where marriages are accepted between relatives, parents and children, and even between humans and animals – so long as there is “love” in between! Does it not matter what interpretation is used? What we are stressing here is that, we have to be very careful in referring to *love* especially by making it the most profound and only factor in marriage.

2.4 In making the foregoing statement, ELCT is fully aware of contentions in the various countries where same-sex marriages have been legalized, that conditions and cultures have evolved to accommodate ‘modern’ living styles, where it is no longer seen as bad taste for same sex union. It is inevitable that changes will occur within society. But this Church also recognizes that some things will change, while other things will never change. For example, ELCT knows and believes that, there is not going to be a time when the nose will change and be the mouth or when the ear will turn to be an eye!!

2.5 It is true that values viewed in a negative outlook in years gone by, may now be perceived in a positive and acceptable manner. And it is obvious that modern-day society will see many things differently. It is also true, though, that the Church cannot be based on shifting values and foundations. It is imperative that Church values and principles remain steadfast even within scientific, cultural, political, social, economic, and other forces. This Church believes that in the Word of God dwell principles of life that cannot be changed or redirected by time, place, or circumstance. One such principle is the principle of holy matrimony, and its derivatives. Consequently, accepting same sex marriages sabotages the foundation of the Word of God concerning continued procreation.

2.6 In addition, cultural or societal changes in some areas such as Europe or America should not be construed as directives to other areas worldwide. And such societal changes should not be forced on to countries outside of the immediate culprit locality; because in other locations people have their own values and cultures they may wish to protect and perpetuate. We as Tanzanians/Africans have our own values and cultures, built over the years, that have guided our lifestyles and which accept only marriages between man and woman. Hence, while some areas may have their circumstances changed to accept same-sex marriages, it should be clearly understood that our conditions (cultures and values) do not allow such marriages.

2.7 The view that marriage or relationship between two people is “between the two people” is a view held only by the one side. We believe that ELCT, on our part, that the subject of marriage is not a

practice of just two people, but one where the 'two' remain part of a family that continues to affect others for many years. That's why the two cannot be allowed to just take everybody for a ride on the basis of, "*Leave us alone, don't interfere with our things; these are our own things, and it's just our own decision to do what we've done,*" etc. No!! The Church and society, in general, have areas, like environmental and cultural preservation, where we must concern ourselves in human issues, regardless of where they are taking place, in full cognizance of humankind responsibility; that no one will do anything that destroys someone else's human-hood, in broad daylight and get away with it. That is how it is, in this same-sex marriage issue.

3. IN CONCLUSION

3.1 Therefore, based on this firm foundation and understanding of the One Church concept, and in view of the necessity to direct the Church in pastoral reverberation, always mindful of the Word of God and its profound meanings, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is not ashamed to stand with the Lord. ELCT ardently wishes to record its stance in prophetic voice, that same-sex marriage is disastrous and a thorn to the body of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.12:12-27); a thorn that is causing a lot of pain on an old wound in ELCT and elsewhere the world over; where similar views are shared on a tasteless and scandalous subject of same-sex marriages. A taste that is already causing untold cacophony, friction and embarrassment in many levels of international relations and leadership.

3.2 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania considers any one-sided decisions oblivious to generally accepted and recognized norms in marriage as flouting, and dreadfully detrimental to the Church as a Body of Christ.

3.3 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania vehemently refuses misinterpretations and scandalous use of Holy Scripture to legalize same-sex marriages.

3.4 We believe that there is not a single area in the Church of God which can effectively deal with all challenges single-handedly, without the synergies of unity found in the Body of Christ. As the saying goes: *Unity is strength*. And this subject of same-sex marriage has grossly undermined our unity and diminished our common strength.

3.5 Undoubtedly, it is not going to help, nor be enough, to blame and judge each other about our differences on this issue. We pray for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to prevail and guide us in prayer, repentance, and continued loving spiritual admonition. We must remain forever mindful of the Word of God as in Col.3:5-17.

3.6 We encourage and firmly join hands with those inside the church around the world – whether they are many or only a few – who oppose the decision to legalize same-sex marriages, we extend a call to stand together in continuing to be the 'salt' and the 'light' in our relations, thus directing our strengths towards communal unity amongst us – unity that

will not ever again allow any more wounds on the body of Christ, meaning the Church.

3.7 We see these as wicked times; wickedness that seeks to destroy the Church of God. Therefore we call on Christians in ELCT and other likeminded churches to stay in intense intercessory prayer, and preserve individual testimony to bless the entire Church of God.

3.8 We have to signal the warning to every ELCT member to be vigilant; stand up, study the Word of God, and refuse strange teachings which can easily devour, new as well as old, believers in this globalized setting.

3.9 In all our actual relations – with churches in Europe, America and elsewhere – this Church has made its position clear. For example, responding to the questionnaire of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regarding exchangeability of Ministers – believing that the objective of such questionnaire was to integrate extensive views of the wider LWF membership – we said;

3.9.1 ELCT, as an LWF member, declares that our church will not be ready to entertain exchangeability of Ministers who are in same-sex marriage relations or their supporters or fanatics. Plainly, ELCT will not welcome anyone living in or supporting same sex marriage or relation to work in this Church. ELCT remains firm and cannot change its position on this matter and thus solicitation, financial conditionality and undue pressure are not acceptable.

3.9.2 Even in its relations with other organizations such as LWF, WCC, LMC and others, ELCT will not endorse any efforts of campaigning or eventual infiltration of people from same-sex marriage camp, or supporters of same-sex marriages, or other forms of homosexual practices.

3.10 ELCT cannot force people in Europe and America to view and work like us in this issue of same-sex marriage, but what we can do, is to be candid in our explanation on the subject. It is our belief that the other side will understand and respect our stance as unmistakably seen in this statement. In addition, ELCT expects that her friends and partners, wherever they may be, who now, however, heatedly disagree with us as ELCT on this issue of same-sex marriages, will not try – and please refrain from trying – in any way whatsoever, at whatever time, or whatever place; to meddle with ELCT standpoint on same-sex marriage or any, or all, other forms of homosexual practices.

BISHOPS OF ELCT

1. Bishop Dr. Alex Gehaz Malasusa, ELCT East and Coastal Diocese and Presiding Bishop of ELCT
2. Bishop Andrew Gulle, ELCT East of Lake Victoria Diocese
3. Bishop Thomas Laiser, ELCT North Central Diocese
4. Bishop Michael Adam, ELCT Diocese in Mara Region
5. Bishop Festo Ngowo, ELCT Dodoma Diocese

6. Bishop Dr. Owdenburg M. Mdegella, ELCT Iringa Diocese
7. Bishop Dr. Benson K. Bagonza, ELCT Karagwe Diocese
8. Bishop Dr. Martin Shao, ELCT Northern Diocese
9. Bishop Elisa Buberwa, ELCT North Western Diocese
10. Bishop Dr. Stephen I. Munga, ELCT North Eastern Diocese
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19. Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Eliraha Mmwiri, ELCT Pare Diocese
20. Bishop Renard K. Mtenji, ELCT Ulanga Kilombero Diocese

Dodoma

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