



LCMS joins others in affirming 'God-given sexual identity'

February 5, 2018 in NATIONAL NEWS, REPORTER, TOP STORY

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By Kevin Armbrust

LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison and the Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, executive director of the [Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty](#), are among 20 religious leaders who have signed an open letter affirming their “commitment to marriage as the union of one man and one woman and as the foundation of society.”

Composed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, “[Created Male and Female: An Open Letter from Religious Leaders](#)” was released Dec. 15.

Among the letter’s signers are representatives of the North American Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church in North America, the Orthodox Church in America, the Church of God in Christ, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

The letter promoting “natural marriage” acknowledges that “all human beings are created by God and thereby have an inherent dignity” and that because “God created each person male or female ... sexual difference is not an accident or flaw – it is a gift from God that helps draw us closer to each other and to God. What God created is good.”

The letter notes that “a person’s discomfort with his or her sex, or the desire to be identified as the other sex, is a complicated reality that needs to be addressed with sensitivity and truth,” and recognizes that “each person deserves to be heard and treated with respect; it is our responsibility to respond to their concerns with compassion, mercy and honesty.”

Warning that “children especially are harmed when they are told that they can ‘change’ their sex” or are “given hormones that will affect their development,” the letter calls “false” and “deeply troubling” the notion “that a man can be or become a woman or vice versa. ... It compels people to either go against reason – that is, to agree with something that is not true – or face ridicule, marginalization, and other forms of retaliation.”

policies that uphold the truth of a person's sexual identity as male or female, and the privacy and safety of all," reads the letter.

"We hope for renewed appreciation of the beauty of sexual difference in our culture and for authentic support of those who experience conflict with their God-given sexual identity."

Standing together

Harrison noted that "on these significant issues where creedal Christians tend to agree, we have developed quite a surprisingly good relationship with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops."

The Synod president also has signed previous USCCB documents "The Defense of Marriage and the Right of Religious Freedom: Reaffirming a Shared Witness" (April 2015), "Marriage and Religious Freedom Ecumenical and Interreligious Open Letter" (January 2012) and "Ecumenical Interreligious Open Letter on Protection of Marriage" (December 2010).

Agreement on these issues has resulted, he said, in a mutually beneficial and respectful working relationship.

"It's even been the case that they, from time to time, submit statements to us and ask for our theological input before going out more broadly with them, and that is a great honor to participate in such a way," Harrison said.

Seltz pointed out that "so much of our gender confusion today starts with our unwillingness to deal with things as they are.

"Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual ... these are *our culture's* terms. Male and female — these are *God's* terms, even *nature's* terms."

As members of a society that seems to question the validity and usefulness of gender-specific terms, Seltz and Harrison say they consider this letter and similar efforts especially important.

"To start with our created identity as people of God — male and female — this is the beginning of being able to honor each other, to love each other and yes, even to be tolerant of one another," said Seltz. "In this day of confusion, this letter helps guide us in this wonderful endeavor of being truly human for others."

While acknowledging the "significant religious differences" among the signers of the letter, Harrison stressed this vital commonality: "We certainly agree on the issues of human beings as male and female."

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Posted Feb. 5, 2018

[Reporter Online](#) is the Web version of Reporter, the official newspaper of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Content is prepared by LCMS Communications.