

THE REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH STATEMENT AND POLICY ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND SAME-GENDER MARRIAGE



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INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is an extremely difficult issue for the Christian Church. We have no definitive answers. We are limited to expressing our views and offering pastoral counsel to clergy and parishes.

The Reformed Celtic Church exists to serve and help its members in living a Christian life. We make no distinction between its members who are homosexual and those who are heterosexual. All are equally children of God, and the Church welcomes and serves them all equally and without distinction.

There are two questions which immediately present themselves. Is homosexual orientation a matter of free will choice? And, are homosexual acts sinful?

References to homosexual persons throughout this document will designate only those who have a so-called "homosexual orientation," meaning those individuals who intrinsically and involuntarily sustain an exclusive and consistent emotional, psychological and sexual attraction to persons of the same sex.

NATURAL LAW

Natural law can best be described as the complex of universally binding moral principles that can be discerned by human reason alone. Applied to human sexuality, this law examines the way in which the human body, male and female, operates and

the purpose of that activity, the creation of new life, and it concludes that to act in any way contrary to that is against the way the body is made and therefore against that law of nature. This position, which has been called "physicalist", is easily seen to be behind the prohibitions against artificial birth control, masturbation, premarital sex, and, obviously, any gay and lesbian sexual activity.

That extreme position considers only the body, and not the whole human person. What should one say, from a biological point of view, when a person feels attracted to persons of the same gender? What is in fact "natural" for that person? Scientific research will help to illuminate this matter (see below).

Further, from a psychological point of view, it is part of the human personality to desire intimate and committed relationships with other persons. No longer described as an individual defined by his or her separateness, the human person is seen today as a being-in-relation, realizing the fullness of personality within and by means of those relationships. In this way the human person is in the image and likeness of God, who is absolute-being-in-relation through the mutual indwelling of the three divine persons. Once again one must ask what is "natural" for the human person?

SCIENCE

Scientific evidence exists that a predisposition to homosexuality may be congenital. It may be a result of one's D.N.A. If so, one does not possess the free will to be homosexual. It is not a choice. One cannot help being born homosexual no more than one can help being born male, female, Caucasian, or Asian.

In recent decades there has been a major paradigm shift in the human sciences' approach to sexuality. Older models of human sexuality described sex in terms of instinctual drive, whereas contemporary psychology understands sexuality in the context of relationship and attachment. Sex is seen as a vehicle of intimacy in adult relations, nurturing the human bond, celebrating identity and relationship. Human beings are the only species that engages in sexual behavior primarily for the development of attachment, and only secondarily for procreation.

Data from the human sciences and from the clinical experiences of clinicians over five decades overwhelmingly support the assertion that homosexuality is a positive variant of human sexuality. Estimates of prevalence vary between 2% and 5% of adults in America and Europe. Empirical studies have repeatedly demonstrated that there is no correlation between homosexuality and psychopathology.

Significant evidence is accumulating that homosexuality may well be largely biologically determined. Genetic studies find significantly higher concordance rates of homosexuality between identical twins than among fraternal twins, and a higher incidence of homosexuality among first-degree relations.

Biological studies indicate that relative exposure to androgen hormones in prenatal development may be determinate in homosexual variance. Contemporary psychoanalysis and developmental psychology assert that sexual-object choice is formed very early, between the ages of three and five, before volitional choice is a possibility. Homosexual men and women report that their sexual orientation is given rather than chosen. In sum, contemporary scientific research indicates that homosexuality may well be biologically determined. The same question must therefore be asked again: what is "natural" for homosexual persons? What rules of conduct should apply to them? As Christians, we seek such rules first of all in Sacred Scripture.

SACRED SCRIPTURE

The second question relates to Biblical injunctions against homosexual acts. The Mosaic purity laws and St. Paul proscribe such acts. But the matter is not that simple.

There are several passages in Sacred Scripture that address homosexual conduct. A Fundamentalist approach takes such passages verbatim and makes absolute rules of conduct for today out of them. Such an approach is simplistic and takes no account of two extremely important facts: the biblical texts were written within totally different cultural contexts, and they were written between two and four thousand years ago. It follows that a serious effort is required to understand exactly what a text is saying and what it means within its own cultural context.

It is then necessary to ask how those Biblical passages, which are texts of the past, can be meaningful, relevant, perhaps, even normative and authoritative for people living today and in the future. To answer this question it is important, first, to realize that the cultural contexts mentioned above are often sinful and oppressive (the example of Lot, in the first text to be examined below, is a good case in point). The limitations and the sinfulness of this historical world behind the Biblical texts mean that those texts cannot automatically be made normative for the world of today. Second, it is important to discern the alternative world the texts are projecting. This world both corrects the evils of the former world and presents the message God is giving us for the building up of his Kingdom. Thus the projected world of God's Kingdom becomes normative for us today.

The following exegesis of the Scriptural texts on homosexuality will attempt to do what has just been outlined, so that we may determine exactly what it is that God is telling us by means of his inspired word.

Genesis 19:1-11 - The Sin of Sodom

Two angels of God appear to Lot in the evening. Lot, not recognizing them, offers them the hospitality of his house. Then the men of the city come to his house and say to him: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot refuses, and instead offers them his two virgin daughters, for

them to do with as they will, as long as they do not touch the men to whom he has offered hospitality.

The word "to know" as used here clearly has sexual implications, meaning "to have sexual intercourse with." The total passage, however, is not about sexual ethics. Rather it concerns inhospitality to strangers, intensified by a most grotesque form of sexually abusive behavior: gang rape. The motivation for wanting to "sodomize" the visitors was to humiliate them by treating them like women, whose social status was limited to that of being merely the "property" of men. In marriage, a woman was "redeemed" (literally, "purchased") by her husband whose property she now became. Defeated soldiers too were often raped by their victors, not merely to denigrate them, but also to demonstrate that they were now the "property" of their aggressors, reduced to the subservient social status of women. In view of this pervasive cultural perception, ancient Israelite society maintained a covenantal code of "sacred Hospitality" that was extended to strangers, widows and orphans because of the fact that these three classes of people were the most vulnerable to poverty, abuse and harm. Lot honors this sacred code of hospitality with the two strangers, and because of that he is regarded as righteous.

But we do not today consider Lot "righteous" in being willing to give up his two daughters to the men of Sodom. Had they been raped and survived the brutality, they would have forever remained social outcasts and unmarriageable for having lost their virginity beforehand. This is an example of the sinful and oppressive world often found behind a biblical text, and we cannot therefore consider such a text as normative for us today. If we did we would consider Lot's willingness to offer his daughters to the mob as ethically acceptable today. Rather it is the world the Bible projects that is normative for us today, and this world is one of respect and care for all persons.

Genesis 19:1-11, taken in its proper historical context, cannot be cited as a sanction against homosexuality. The text is, rather, a clear and unequivocal condemnation of abusive and denigrating behavior toward other human persons, which in this case takes the form of attempted gang rape.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 - The Holiness Code

These two texts, found in close proximity to one another, read as follows: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev 18:22). "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them" (Lev 20:13).

These two texts present a clear prohibition of male homogenital activity. However, neither here nor anywhere else in the Bible, with the exception of Romans 1:26-27, discussed below, is there any condemnation of lesbian sexual activity. And perhaps more telling is the fact that in the two prohibitions quoted above the reference to male-male sexual activity compares one man lying with another to lying with a woman.

Once again, these texts betray the idea that for a man to engage in homosexual activity is to be denigrated to the socially inferior status of a woman.

The entrenched patriarchalism found in much of the Bible is in evidence here, and it must be taken into consideration in interpreting these and similar texts within their historical and cultural contexts. The two prohibitions in question are found in a section of Leviticus that has been labeled the "Holiness Code," a series of moral, cultic and humanitarian laws and prohibitions extending from Chapter 17 through Chapter 26. It seems to have been an originally independent legal document dating to the end of the Israelite monarchal period (around the sixth century BC) which was later edited by one of the compositional traditions of the Pentateuch, the Priestly tradition, and incorporated into the larger corpus of what we now know as Leviticus.

Another product of the same era, the prophetic literature of Ezekiel, emphasizes "holiness" as one of God's quintessential attributes, and it seems to have had a significant influence on the Holiness Code, which exhibits the same theological presuppositions. These are well expressed in Leviticus 19:2: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," and similar texts (Lev 20:26, 21:8, etc.).

Under the Priestly influence, this Holiness Code was eventually related to the concept of ritual purity. One must be holy, in fact, in order to engage worthily in rituals of worship. In order to obtain the purity necessary for rituals of worship, one had to accomplish certain acts, such as washing one's hands, or avoid certain actions, such as eating the flesh of animals considered unclean. But this reality continued to evolve. God also makes moral demands on his people, as in the Ten Commandments. And so, posterior to the writing and editing of the Holiness Code, ritual purity was gradually transformed into ethical purity. Avoiding what was ritually impure became avoiding sin; ritual purity developed into purity of conscience.

The Holiness Code in itself was concerned with just that: the holiness of God, and subsequently that of the People of God. In the Holiness Code Israel is being instructed to set itself apart from the surrounding nations, to be pure and holy before God. This means that Israel was to refrain from ritual behaviors and social practices that would be tantamount to an observance of the statutes of alien gods and their people: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God" (Lev 18:1-4).

In close connection with the concept of "separateness," both of the injunctions under consideration refer to the act of male sexual activity as an "abomination." In this context the word "abomination" suggests that which is "unclean," that which makes one ritually impure. The same Chapter 20 of Leviticus brings this out clearly, in a text which brings together the various points that have been made: "I am the Lord your

God; I have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine" (Lev 20:24-26).

Understanding the texts in question in light of this passage makes it evident that the prohibitions against male, same-gender relations are not moral or ethical in nature, but rather religious and cultural. The references to them as "abominations," then, have nothing to do with the sexual acts in themselves, but rather with their specific religious context within ancient Israelite culture, as acts of ritual impurity.

The Gospels

The Gospels, which most readily put us in touch with the traditions of Jesus' teachings, are silent on the issue of homosexuality. In one sense this is not surprising. The Book of Leviticus, as shown above, condemns homosexuality for reasons of ritual purity, and ritual purity is something about which Jesus was very much unconcerned: "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defiles a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile" (Matthew 15:17-20).

Once the reason for which homogenital acts were condemned in the Old Testament Holiness Code (ritual purity) was rejected, it stands to reason that if the issue of homosexuality were of particular concern to Jesus or the primitive church, we should expect to find in the Gospels either an alternative reason for condemning it, or an attempt to demonstrate why these acts are wrong in themselves. Neither is the case. However, there are New Testament texts outside of the Gospels which are relevant to this issue, and these must be addressed in their own historical and cultural context if they are to be properly understood and interpreted for the contemporary church. It is to these texts that we now turn our attention.

Romans 1:26-27 - The Meaning of "Contrary to Nature"

These two verses read: "For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural (Greek, 'contrary to nature') and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error." In the larger passage of which these two verses are part, Paul is arguing that God "gave up" the gentiles to "unnatural" passions for failing to recognize him in creation, in which he has always been revealed (verses 20-22).

The implications of this statement are rooted in several beliefs about homosexuality commonly presupposed in ancient Greco-Roman culture, which can be summarized as follows: First, any persons who engaged in homosexual activity were intentionally overriding their natural sexual desire for persons of the opposite sex. The contemporary category of "sexual orientation" (coined only in the last century) had not been in any way conceived of in Paul's time. Nor was there any conception that biology, psychology or sociology played a role in shaping and determining one's sexual orientation. Paul's own language in Romans 1:26, in which he maintains that "women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural..." and men were said to be "giving up natural intercourse with women..." betrays this conceptual limitation.

Second, since homosexual acts were thought to be a willful denial of one's natural sexual desires, they were also commonly presumed to be intrinsically lustful.

Third, homosexual activity was presumed to require the partners to exchange their natural roles as dominant/active (in the case of men) or submissive/passive (in the case of women), thereby "giving up" the natural roles of men or women. As was noted earlier, this was the very reason victorious soldiers would sometimes rape their enemy soldiers: in order to force them into the submissive sexual role of women, thereby denigrating them as weak, effeminate, womanly.

Fourth, it was widely believed that homosexuality was a potential temptation for all people and that to engage in it would render its participants sterile. Thus, there was an ongoing fear that unbridled homosexual activity could lead to the extinction of the human race!

An examination of this broader social and cultural context concerning beliefs about homosexuality makes it evident that Paul's statements are neither unique nor particular to Christianity. Rather, he is merely reiterating the presumed truths of his contemporary culture -- presumptions which, on virtually all levels of human advancement, have since been rendered inadequate, untenable, and completely erroneous. In the matter of the ethical implications of homosexual relationships in the contemporary church, Paul's statements in Romans 1:26-27 are inconclusive because the cultural assumptions upon which he bases them have been proven false.

In cases like this, careful exegesis is necessary to discern what is divinely inspired, and therefore universally valid, and what is due to human ignorance or shortsightedness, and therefore not universally valid. Such careful exegesis is particularly important in understanding the term "contrary to nature" or "unnatural" in verse 26. Was Paul using this term in a concrete sense, likely stemming from his own Jewish background, in which the "nature" of a thing referred to its essential character and identity? This is the meaning he intended in other parts of his writings (for example, Galatians 4:8, referring to entities "that by nature are not gods," and 1 Corinthians 11:14, asking, "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?"). Thus it would seem that if this is the meaning Paul had in mind, he was not making an ethical statement about homosexual activity, as much

as arguing that it was uncharacteristic or atypical for heterosexuals to act in a homosexual manner. To act "unnaturally," according to this view, is to act in a way that is inconsistent with what is expected. God himself, in Romans 11:24, is said to act contrary to the divine nature in grafting the gentiles onto the olive tree that is Israel.

Or rather, was Paul using the term "contrary to nature" in the Stoic sense that was prevalent in his day? This carried the abstract meaning of "nature and the laws of nature." If this is the meaning Paul was giving to the term, it is consistent with the ancient Greco-Roman cultural assumption that homosexuals were "naturally" heterosexuals who out of lust freely chose to give themselves over to homosexual relations. Modern science, on the contrary, has recognized the nature of "sexual orientation" and has thus confirmed the falsity of those ancient cultural presuppositions. This in turn shows, once again, that a universally valid code of conduct cannot be drawn from this text.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 (Interpreting the Greek words "malakoi" and "arsenokoitai")

These two texts both raise the question of the best way in which to translate the two Greek words noted above, both of which are important for this subject. The texts read as follows: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (malakoi), sodomites (arsenokoitai), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers--none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). "...the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites (arsenokoitai), slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me" (1 Timothy 1:9-11).

These Greek terms "malakoi" and "arsenokoitai," here translated as "male prostitutes" and "sodomites" respectively, have undergone many and various translations in English Bibles—a fact which, itself, lays bare the reality that each of these terms presents a very difficult problem of interpretation. Among various interpretations we can locate renderings such as "adulterers and homosexuals" and, combining both words into one description, "sexual perverts." In other English translations "malakoi" has been variously rendered as "catamites," "the effeminate," "boy prostitutes," "masturbators," and even "sissies." The term "arsenokoitai," on the other hand, has seen translations including "homosexuals," "sodomites," "child molesters," "perverts," "people of infamous habits," and recently "practicing homosexuals." In view of this ambiguity, we can conclude at least this much: that any attempt to interpret these texts as expressive of a contemporary understanding of "homosexual orientation" cannot be substantiated and is ultimately without warrant. The best that can be determined here is that sexual activity which involves exploitation, inequality or abuse is ethically reprehensible, regardless of the gender of its participants. These texts, once again, are

simply incapable of speaking to any contemporary understanding of sexual orientation and its ethical implications for same-sex relations.

The Reformed Celtic Church is not “throwing out the Bible” nor are we succumbing to the social pressures of “political correctness.” We are merely cognizant of the fact that the Church is an evolving, spiritual organism and that Her understanding and interpretation of Scriptures, likewise, evolves. We no longer stone adulterers, condone slavery, burn heretics, or insist that females remain silent in church matters. Similarly, we should no longer discriminate against or ostracize homosexuals. Rather, we should welcome them into the full life of the Church

Christians (who by their faith are wrapped in the righteous robes of Christ) are free from the Mosaic dietary and purity laws while still observant of the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue does not mention homosexual acts. St. Paul is contradictory and ambiguous on the issue.

Homosexuality as a perceived orientation or variant of human sexuality has been understood only recently. Its absence is therefore part of the historical limitations of the world behind the biblical text. Conversely, the world projected by the Bible ---the Kingdom of God --- demands that we surpass those historical limitations in working toward that Kingdom and determining just what God is telling us to guide those efforts. To ignore the advances in the human sciences regarding human sexuality inevitably results in an inadequate, and ultimately oppressive, interpretation of the references to homosexuality in the Bible. This is not unique to the question of homosexuality. A host of other practices, such as patriarchy, sexism, anti-Semitism, slavery, and so on, have been defended by means of biblical texts. The same careful exegesis is necessary to determine God's revealed word in such areas.

TRADITION

After Christ's death and resurrection, the apostles went out and preached his message. Many persons accepted this message and formed communities of believers who lived their lives in accordance with it. Eventually Christ's teaching was summarized in the written gospels. And some of the apostles wrote letters to various communities of believers to present that message and apply it to their circumstances. All of this is tradition.

More precisely, Tradition (with a capital "T") is the process of transmitting the life, teaching and worship of the Church through which the message of Christ to the apostles is passed on to succeeding generations. And tradition (with a small "t") is the content that is passed on in this way. This comprises the whole life of the Church; all that it is and believes, all that contributes to holiness of life within it. Sacred Scripture itself is part of that tradition, since an oral tradition existed before it was written down; and conversely Scripture is the critical norm to which tradition is subject as the centuries go on.

Tradition is a living reality, not only a group of statements on God and human life to be believed through faith. With Scripture included within it, it is for us the fountain of God's revelation as this is applied to changing circumstances over the centuries.

Christian tradition, all through the Middle Ages and down to the present, has been consistent in its denunciation of homosexuality. It has judged all homosexual acts as both unnatural and seriously sinful. The fundamental reason for this judgment is the natural law as described above. Human sexuality is intended for procreation, and any use of this faculty outside of that end is judged to be against nature.

Strict as this position is, however, other elements of the Christian tradition on this matter must be noted. During the Middle Ages, throughout the Christian world and particularly in Europe, there were Christian ceremonies solemnizing same-gender unions. These were at first only sets of prayers, but by the time of the much fuller development of liturgical marriage ceremonies in the twelfth century, they had become a complete office which included, among other elements, the lighting of candles, the placing of both persons' hands on the Gospel, the joining of their right hands (the basic symbol of marriage in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages), the Lord's Prayer, Eucharistic communion, and a kiss. These were ceremonies of personal commitment, and they were religious ceremonies, expressing a commitment that was blessed by a priest.

After the Middle Ages homosexuality came to be seen in an extremely negative way, and these same-gender unions diminished in number, without ever disappearing completely.

Tradition, as noted above, is a living reality, and it must not be confused with a kind of traditionalism which believes that all has already been revealed and that nothing can change. As new developments occur and new discoveries are made, the Christian Church attempts to understand them and to determine, in the context of its life and faith, what God is saying to us through them.

In the matter of homosexuality, scientific research is showing that this condition is something a person is born with, not something a person chooses (see "Science" above). And the human person is seen in modern times, not as an isolated and separate individual, but as a being-in-relation, attaining the fullness of personality in and through those relationships (see "Natural Law" above).

Those two facts --- the existence of a tradition of same-gender unions blessed by a priest in a religious ceremony within the negative "official" tradition on homosexuality, and the evolving concept of homosexuality and of the human person itself --- show that tradition, precisely because it is a centuries-long lived reality, is not a simple source of divine revelation, any more than Sacred Scripture; and that, like Scripture, it must be studied carefully to determine what God is telling us through this channel of revelation.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Reformed Celtic Church asserts there is no valid reason why same-gender unions should be illegal. However, we are cognizant that such unions are legal in a limited number of civil jurisdictions. As of the date of this statement, the following applies:

Currently there are 5 (five) states that have legalized Same Gender Marriage. They are: Iowa, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Washington DC is scheduled to pass legislation allowing same gender marriage sometime this year (2010).

California had allowed same gender marriage from June 16th 2008 to November 4th 2008 under a Supreme Court ruling; however the California State constitution has since been amended to ban future same gender marriages. The state does however recognize same gender marriages from California during that date period, and other states that have legalized same sex marriage regardless of the time period.

New York recognizes same gender marriage from other states and countries but has a ban on same gender marriage being conducted in the state.

The Coquille Indian tribe in Oregon has legalized same gender marriages.

The following states have something called a *same-gender union* that is not recognized as a marriage but does afford similar legal rights to the domestic partnerships: Colorado, Hawaii, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Wisconsin and Washington State. These unions are contractual and do not involve a traditional marriage ceremony but they do provide a good many of the legal rights afforded to married heterosexual couples. It is unclear whether these states recognize same-gender marriages from the states that have legalized them.

The remaining states have not legalized same-gender marriages and also do not recognize same-gender marriage from other states or countries where they have been legalized. This means that a couple who are married in Connecticut moving to, for example, North Carolina, will not be recognized legally as being married. It is also important to note that some states have prohibitions against same-gender living arrangements which could lead to prosecution under those statutes.

CONCLUSION

All of the above considerations show that homosexuality is a complex and multi-faceted reality and that one's approach or attitude to it, if this is to be Christian, must carefully consider all the ways in which God speaks to us. In an attempt to do that, the Reformed Celtic Church looks first to Sacred Scripture.

When someone asked Jesus what the first of the commandments was, Jesus replied, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:29-31). When someone then asked Jesus who his neighbor was, Jesus replied with the parable of the good Samaritan: it was the person who showed mercy to a man who had been robbed and beaten by thieves who was that man's neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). And Jesus repeated this basic message in other ways: If someone wants to take your coat, give him your cloak as well (Matthew 5:40). If anyone forces you to go one mile with him, go an extra mile (Matthew 5:41). Go after the sheep that is lost (Luke 15:4).

The message is clear: loving your neighbor, the second greatest commandment, means doing good to that neighbor, and not harm. This is the very essence of the Christian life concerning other persons. With this teaching in mind and considering the matter that was developed above, the Reformed Celtic Church relates to homosexual persons in the following ways.

No moral guilt whatever attaches to the fact of a homosexual orientation. All homosexual persons have the same human dignity and human rights as heterosexual persons. They are to be treated with respect and sensitivity, and are not to be subject to any kind of discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Homosexual persons need and want intimate human relationships, as do heterosexuals. It is through such relationships, as described above, that human persons reach the full development of their personality. Such relationships between homosexual persons are to be honored and supported, and the Church's ministry is present to help them become and be life-giving. If a homosexual couple wishes to make a public commitment to each other, the Church blesses such a desire and celebrates it by means of a marriage ceremony presided over by one of its clergypersons. Since the Reformed Celtic Church is a fully sacramental church, such a marriage is a sacrament. In accordance with what has been written above about the essential nature of relationships in a human life, it is such a relationship that is being celebrated in a same-gender union. It is love, and not sex, that most centrally defines Christian matrimony, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

If a gay or lesbian person believes that God is calling him or her to the priesthood, such a person is welcome to seek entry into the Church's formation program for Holy Orders. The fact of a homosexual orientation is not an impediment to Holy Orders. The Church ordains those persons, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, who in its judgment possess the qualities required for priestly ministry and who complete the formation program for Holy Orders.

The Church's policy in regards to homosexual persons can perhaps best be expressed by saying that it expects of homosexual persons the same thing that it expects of heterosexual persons, that is that they are doing their best to live their Christian lives seriously. There should be no need to go beyond that.

In continuing to look to Scripture for inspiration, this statement can perhaps well end by giving the Bible's presentation of the beautiful and loving relationship between David, the future king, and Jonathan, the son of the current king, Saul. "When David had finished speaking to Saul [after killing Goliath], the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt" (1 Samuel 18:1-4). This deep friendship is referred to as a "sacred covenant" (1 Samuel 20:8). Jonathan loved David "as he loved his own life" (1 Samuel 20:17).

Later, when David was hiding outside the city from the jealous wrath of Saul, Jonathan came to him. "As soon as the boy [with whom Jonathan had come] had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, "The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city" (1 Samuel 20:41-42).

Finally, after a battle with the Philistines in which both Saul and Jonathan were killed, David intoned this lamentation: "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided, they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.... How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (2 Samuel 1:23, 25-27).

We have consulted as Bishops, Abbots, and Abbesses of the Reformed Celtic Church and we have concluded that given both the question of free will and the Biblical ambiguity on this subject, homosexuality should not be considered a sin. Therefore, no person shall be denied access to any of the Sacraments or to application for Holy Orders based solely on sexual preference.

We will ordain homosexuals to Holy Orders. However, single homosexual clergy are required to maintain celibacy as are single heterosexual clergy.

The Reformed Celtic Church will allow same-gender unions. Holy Matrimony is a sacramental commitment. Monogamy and fidelity are incumbent on same-gender unions as they are on heterosexual unions. Adultery is a sin.

Finally, the Reformed Celtic Church is neither a gay nor a straight Church. It is a Trinitarian Universalist church with Celtic traditions. We not wish to incur conflicts between homosexuals and heterosexuals within parishes, congregations, communities

or ministries. Many heterosexuals must get beyond homophobic prejudices. Likewise, many homosexuals must cease from demonizing heterosexuals. We must transcend “us” and “them”. In Christ, there is only “us”.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH PASTORAL COUNCIL

WHEREAS the Bible affirms and celebrates human expressions of love and partnership, calling us to live out fully that gift of God in responsible, faithful, committed relationships that recognize and respect the image of God in all people; and WHEREAS the life and example of Jesus of Nazareth provides a model of radically inclusive love and abundant welcome for all; and

WHEREAS we proclaim ourselves to be listening to the voice of a Still Speaking God and that at all times in human history there is always yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word; and

WHEREAS recognition of marriage carries with it significant access to institutional support, rights and benefits; and

WHEREAS children of families headed by same-gender couples should receive all legal rights and protections; and

WHEREAS legislation to ban recognition of same-gender marriages further undermine the civil liberties of gay and lesbian couples and contributes to a climate of misunderstanding and polarization, increasing hostility against gays and lesbians; and WHEREAS a Constitutional Amendment has been introduced to this Congress to limit marriage to “only the union of a man and a woman”; and

WHEREAS equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender is an issue deserving of serious, faithful discussion by people of faith, taking into consideration the long, complex history of marriage and family life, layered as it is with cultural practices, economic realities, political dynamics, religious history and biblical interpretation; and

WHEREAS all people are entitled to full civil liberties and equal protection under the law without discrimination related to sexual preference; and

WHEREAS civil jurisdictions should legislatively recognize that traditional marriage is not the only stable living unit entitled to legal protection;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH affirms equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender and declares that the government should not interfere with couples regardless of gender who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legally recognized marriage; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH affirms equal access to the basic rights, institutional protections and quality of life conferred by the recognition of marriage; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH calls for an end to rhetoric that fuels hostility, misunderstanding, fear and hatred expressed toward gay, and lesbian persons; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the clergy of the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH are called upon to communicate this resolution to local, state and national

legislators, urging them to support equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender.

In recognition that these resolutions may not reflect the views or current understanding of all bodies, and acknowledging the pain and struggle their passage will engender within the gathered church, the Pastoral Council encourages the following:

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Pastoral Council calls upon all settings of the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH to engage in serious, respectful, and prayerful discussion of the covenantal relationship of marriage and equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that, with the caveat that no clergy person is compelled against his or her conscience or Biblical interpretation to officiate a same-gender marriage, the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH calls upon clergy and congregations, after prayerful biblical, theological, and historical study, to consider adopting Wedding Policies that do not discriminate against couples based on gender; and

LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Pastoral Council urges the clergy, congregations and individuals of the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH to prayerfully consider and support local, state and national legislation to grant equal marriage rights to couples regardless of gender, and to work against legislation, including constitutional amendments, which denies civil marriage rights to couples based on gender.

Affirmed by the REFORMED CELTIC CHURCH Pastoral Council
March 4, 2010. We, hereby, affix our signatures.

✦ Taoiseach Thomas John Faulkenbury, OSJ (Presiding Bishop)

✦ Tanaiste Alban Kirk Mason, EOSM (Auxiliary Bishop)

Father Abbott ✦ Kenneth Lee Hasty, SOS

Abbess Brigid Danielle Hegdale, SBM

Dissenting

✦ Tanaiste John Henry Chiaromonte, OSJ (Auxiliary Bishop)