

February 2005, *Equipping*



Same sex marriage

On December 9 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Parliament must decide on the new definition of marriage as a union between two persons, replacing the traditional definition as the union between a man and a woman. Meanwhile, all the provincial Courts have ruled in favour of the new definition, except Alberta, New Brunswick and PEI.

As public debate over this formative issue rages in anticipation of the upcoming Parliamentary debate, how should we as pastors and leaders respond?

First and foremost, our call is to extend the love of Christ to all people including gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who come to us seeking ministry and guidance.

Further, we need to respond and minister out of the common frame of reference that we hold which is based on the authority of Scripture and is expressed in our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 19. This common frame of reference was articulated in the pastoral letter of June 2003.

“We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. Christian marriage is a mutual relationship in Christ, a covenant made in the context of the church. According to Scripture, right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship.”

“This position affirms the teaching of Scripture and up-holds the traditional understanding of marriage. Therefore, it is clear that the conducting or blessing of same-sex marriages is outside of our understanding and practice as taught in Scripture, and held in our Confession.”

The authority for credentialing pastors is lodged in our area conferences and overseen by our Conference Ministers. Guided by the same confession, they will offer support and guidance to pastors and churches as they face questions in the days to come.

I encourage you as pastors to lead your congregation in prayer for our Minister of Justice and Members of Parliament as our understanding of the nature of marriage is laid before them.

Thus far, the Church has been assured by government that church ministers will not be legally required to perform same sex unions. We are also free to express and affirm our convictions to our MPs by letter, email or telephone.

But most importantly, let us not allow the controversy around this divisive issue to detract us from offering sensitive caring ministry to all who struggle with gender and sexual issues in their lives, the lives of their family members, and those who minister to them.

—Sven Eriksson, *Denominational Minister*