

COMMITTEE TO PROVIDE PASTORAL GUIDANCE  
RE: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

CRC SYNOD  
JUNE 15, 2016

---

# MANDATE

---

- ❖ ...give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the Acts of Synod 1973 Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.

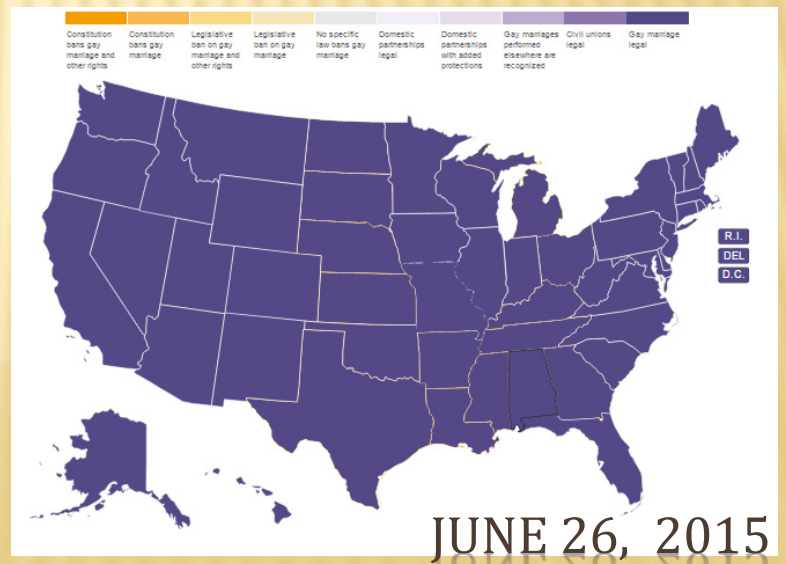
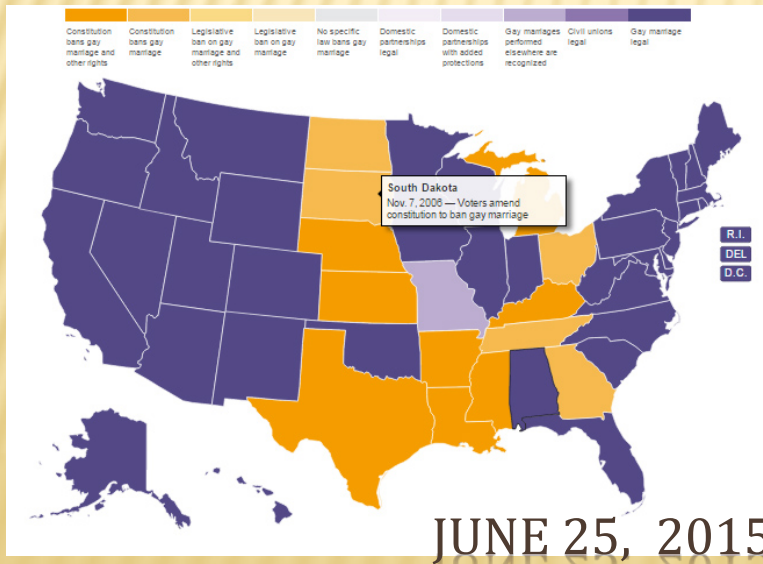
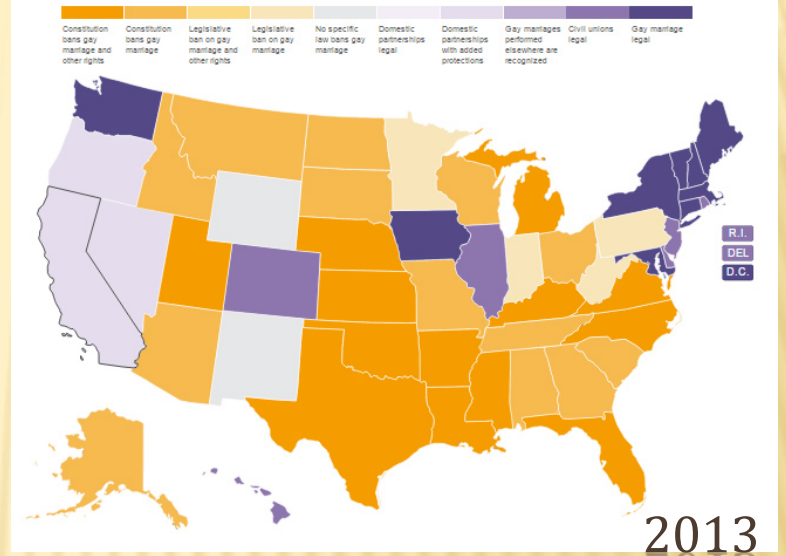
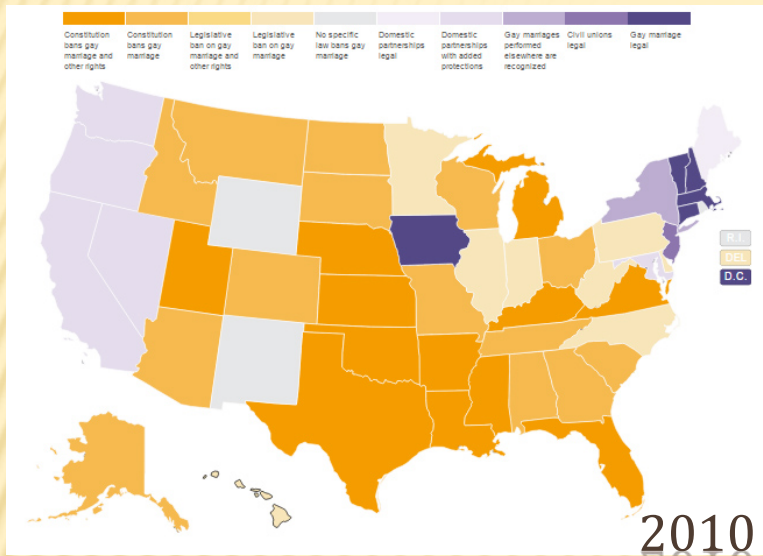
# SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN CANADA



2001

2005

# SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN THE U.S.



# OBSERVATIONS ON MANDATE

---

- Committee was to take as given the biblical/theological perspective of the 1973 report on homosexuality, which distinguishes between orientation and behavior: 1) same-sex orientation is not of itself sinful; and 2) same-sex sexual behavior is sinful.
- The committee's mandate was NOT to address homosexuality and sexual ethics, but to address the cultural and legal aspects of same-sex marriage as they impact the church and its ministry.
- The committee was instructed to follow a 'shepherding model' in carrying out its work. A shepherding model engages the church in conversation while the committee is completing its work. Survey, listening sessions, and consultations with ethnic church leaders are a part of our mandate.

# WHAT DOES 'MARRIAGE' MEAN?

- *“In marriage, a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity.”*  
(1979 CRC Form for the Solemnization of Marriage)
- *“... a covenant relationship established by mutual vows between a man and a woman united by God.”* (1980 Synodical Report)
- *“... a civil contract between two persons, to which the consent of the parties, capable in law of contracting, is essential.”*  
(Minnesota Statutes §517.01)
- ✘ *“... the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.”*  
(Civil Marriage Act, S.C. 2005, §2)

# WHAT DOES 'MARRIAGE' MEAN?

- *“In marriage, a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity.”*  
(1979 CRC Form for the Solemnization of Marriage)
- *“... a covenant relationship established by mutual vows between a man and a woman united by God.”* (1980 Synodical Report)
- *“... a civil contract between two persons, to which the consent of the parties, capable in law of contracting, is essential.”*  
(Minnesota Statutes §517.01)
- ✘ *“... the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.”*  
(Civil Marriage Act, S.C. 2005, §2)

# CIVIL & RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE

“CIVARRIAGE”	“RELIMARRIAGE”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishes legal rights, privileges, &amp; responsibilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishes a covenantal relationship between a woman, a man, and God within the context of a covenantal community.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishes legal status for inheritance, medical decision-making, and kinship/parental status. In U.S., over 1000 laws dependent on legal marital status</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Solemnizes a social/spiritual relationship of trust, intimacy, commitment, and support.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No longer (trend since mid-1900s) establishes legal and illegal (criminal) sexual relationships and practices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demarcates appropriate and inappropriate sexual relations.</li></ul>

See John Inazu, “What to Expect After the Supreme Court’s Marriage Decision.” *Christianity Today Online*, April 28, 2015. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/april-web-only/what-to-expect-after-supreme-courts-coming-marriage-decisio.html>



# “LISTENING” – TO THE VOICES PRESENT

---

1. Survey – In conjunction with the Calvin Center for Social Research, over 4000 persons submitted survey responses (See Appendix A)
2. Consultations – Leaders and representatives of ethnic and sexual minority communities.
3. Listening sessions – 17 listening sessions with classes and congregations with discussion on the impact of same-sex marriage.

# “LISTENING” – TO THE VOICES PRESENT

<p><b>I’m not sure why we’re having this conversation. The Bible is clear about sexual sin and same-sex behavior. Do we even need to talk about it?</b></p>	<p><b>In our community, we simply do not talk about it.</b></p>	<p><b>I know several same-sex couples. What the church taught when I was young doesn’t match what I experience.</b></p>	<p><b>I’m concerned about young adults in the church. Same-sex relationships are a part of everyday life for them. We’re going to lose them . . .</b></p>
<p><b>All the church cares about with gay people is if they’re having sex. Can we talk about love, commitment, and intimacy?</b></p>	<p><b>The most important thing is that we love people and encourage people to love each other. Can we stop being judgmental?</b></p>	<p><b>When will the church stop . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>changing . . .</b></li><li>• <b>hurting . . .</b></li><li>• <b>compromising</b></li><li>• <b>being stuck</b></li></ul>	<p><b>My sister/brother is gay, and our family doesn’t know how to respond . . . .</b></p>

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

---

- Beware the terms “majority” and “minority”, which sounds oppositional. Here we have a “main” report that all 9 committee members signed and a “partial minority” with 2 committee members disagreeing in three areas. Note: All nine committee members signed the main report. THIS DISTINCTION IS VERY IMPORTANT!
- This report is not about homosexuality *per se*. It is about civil same-sex marriage and the social, legal, cultural, and ecclesiastical ramifications of recent changes in North American society.
- The conceptual issue is primarily the relationship of the church to civil society/government and the relationship of civil and religious marriage. This is introduction and background.
- The ecclesiastical/pastoral issue is same-sex couples/families and the church community. These issues make up the guidelines.

Issue/Question	Majority Report	Minority Report
Same-Sex Weddings/Celebrations		
Members attending SS Wedding	At discretion of member. Circumstances too varied for a uniform, simple answer.	*
Members participating in SS Wedding	At discretion of member. Circumstances too varied for a uniform, simple answer.	
Ordained Persons attending SS Wedding	At discretion of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. Circumstances too varied for a uniform, simple answer. Wise for pastor to consult with council.	
Ordained Persons Participating in SS Wedding	At discretion of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. Circumstances too varied for a uniform, simple answer. Wise for pastor to consult with council.	Office-bearers may NOT participate in SS ceremonies.
Ordained Persons Officiating at SS Wedding	No to religious SSM. <u>Extremely</u> narrow exception for civil SSM.	No to both religious and civil marriage. Ministers, by definition, cannot officiate a purely civil ceremony.
Church Facilities Made Available for SS Weddings/Celebrations	At discretion of individual church. Considerations identified.	Adopt exclusive wedding and facility use policy.

## Church Membership and Sacraments

Welcome and Attend	Yes.	
Membership	Formal rules say 'no'. Is the person/couple applying to be members? Transferring membership? Already members? Move slowly. Be transparent. Be gracious. Discipleship is more than discipline. Organic body life is more fundamental than formal membership rules.	Largely in agreement. Stronger emphasis on initiating formal discipline.
Baptism of Children	Explore options, limited though they be.	No.
Participate in Communion	Yes, unless excommunication is completed.	Yes, until church decides its inappropriate.

Supporting Christian marriage/family	Emphasize importance of marriage, but with openness and a broad definition of family	
Cultural Contexts	Varied response of ethnic communities to homosexuality and SSM	
Young adults	Face the changing perception among young adults regarding SSM	
Same-sex oriented persons	A lament	
1973/2002 decision	Language & emphasis requires revisiting; encourage appropriate use of Biblical texts	
Conversion/reparative therapy	The 1973/2002 recourse to conversion therapy needs to be re-thought and dangers avoided.	

# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Dr. Rolf Bouma, chair, and Ms. Julia Smith, reporter, when the majority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage is considered.
2. That synod receive the accompanying report for information and recommend it for consideration to churches, pastors, and church leaders and members for background understanding and to promote informed discussion on the matter of civil same-sex marriage.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

3. That synod adopt the pastoral guidance contained in section VI of this report as its counsel to churches, pastors, church leaders, and members for addressing the ramifications of civil same-sex marriage as it affects the church and its members.
4. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage. That synod dismiss the committee.