

Testimony of Phyllis Johnson, PhD

In opposition to House Concurrent Resolution 3013

My name is Phyllis Johnson. I am a student at Wartburg Theological Seminary, anticipating ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) in America later this year. As part of my training, I currently serve as a Synod Authorized Lay Minister and Intern Pastor for three small ELCA congregations in the Grand Forks area. My responsibility as a faith leader is guide my congregations and community in accordance with Holy Scripture and the principles of justice that are articulated in the United States Constitution. This resolution concerns the right of same-sex couples to marry, and as such, is in conflict with both my Christian faith and constitutional law.

The ELCA's theology is centered on grace, love, and justice. These theological principles allow for same-sex marriage in the church and civilly. Two of the principal scripture passages supporting this are Galatians 3:28 and Mark 12:29-31. They read as follows.

Galatians 3:28—"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We are bound by love that is not dependent on gender, race, or status. When two people love one another and are fully committed to one another and wish to be married, they should not be denied the opportunity to be married.

Mark 12:29-31—When asked what is the greatest commandment, "Jesus answered, '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, all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Love is at the center of our Christian faith; it is the core of the greatest commandments. If we keep loving couples from being legally married, we are violating the commandment to love one another. Same-sex couples should be able to live there love for one another fully within marriage just like those of us who are in heterosexual marriages.

This resolution urges the overturn of established constitutional law. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruled that same-sex couples have the right to marry. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees equal protection of the law to all, undergirds this decision. Overturning this decision would violate the constitutional rights of same-sex couples, and it would violate my right to marry them, which I am authorized to do by my bishop.

Same-sex couples deserve the right to marry like everybody else. They deserve the dignity of having their relationships recognized by both the church and the law.

As a scientist, I reject the idea that being LGBTQ+ is a “lifestyle.” For example, for more than 30 years, there has been scientific evidence that homosexuality is determined by genetics. There are more than 500 species of animals that exhibit homosexual behavior. We should no more discriminate against this aspect of genetics than we should discriminate against people who don’t have blue eyes.

As someone who has family members who are gay, lesbian, and trans, I find this resolution to be deeply hurtful. I want all of my grandchildren and nieces and nephews to be treated equally and with justice before the law. That includes recognizing their right to be married when they find a person they wish to be committed to before God. The anti-LGBTQ+ animus reflected in this and other bills has made at least one of them reluctant to even come to Grand Forks to visit me, because she doesn’t feel welcome or even safe in this state. She also happens to be a highly skilled RN, but she will never consider relocating to North Dakota because her personal dignity is not respected. Bills like this are an effective way to heighten, rather than mitigate, our state’s workforce shortage.

I urge you to Vote NO on this resolution.

Phyllis E. Johnson, PhD.

ELCA seminary student, Grand Forks, ND.