

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the years since the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, Christians have faced increasing pressure to conform to the changing cultural definitions of marriage, sexuality and gender. As a church body committed to what Holy Scripture has to say regarding the lifelong union of one man and one woman as husband and wife, and to the sanctifying of those unions through the Word of God and prayer, the LCMS remains steadfast in defense of and advocacy for traditional marriage. Our 2016 convention addressed itself to this in a number of resolutions, most notably Resolution 14-04: “To Affirm the Right of Clergy to Continue Conducting Weddings in Accordance with Confession.”

Nevertheless, questions of conscience over this matter continue to arise. LCMS clergy have raised questions about whether we as a church should begin to approach our officiating of marriages differently. In particular, some have wondered whether we should continue to require Christian couples seeking marriage to obtain civil marriage licenses, and/or if pastors should continue to sign civil marriage licenses on behalf of the state.

The president of the Synod and several other LCMS officials and entities have asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to address a number of questions related to this issue. With this report, the Commission seeks to provide a resource for pastors and congregations of the Synod to consider the theological and political dimensions of marriage and the rapidly changing views of marriage in our culture. The report also offers an opinion on how, why and to what extent clergy — and Christians generally — should or may in good conscience participate in the civil licensure of marriage.

We pray that this document will be of use for all interested parties, but we especially commend it to our clergy and ask them to read, study and discuss this significant issue together.

In Christ,

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Executive Director, LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations