



Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations (CALC)

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Mrs. Edda Bosse
Bremische Evangelische Kirche
Franziuseck 2-4
28199 Bremen
Deutschland

Re: Pastor Olaf Latzel – Suspension of Pastoral Ministry

Dear Mrs. Bosse

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to you in my capacity as President of the Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations (CALC) a federally chartered Canadian church body.

The purpose of this correspondence is to intervene on behalf of Pastor Olaf Latzel and the St. Martini Congregation of Bremen, specifically in relation to the suspension of Pastor Latzel's pastoral duties following a conviction for "inciting hatred" against homosexuals in private remarks made to couples at a marriage seminar. During the seminar, Pastor Latzel upheld the Biblical definitions of gender and sexuality, condemned the Berlin Pride March, referred to gender ideology as "an attack against God's order of Creation" and labeled militant homosexuals who damaged church property and disturbed worship services as criminals. I beseech and implore you to lift the suspension on Pastor Latzel's ministry imposed by the Bremische Evangelische Kirche (BEK) and restore his ministry at the St. Martini congregation. The bases for this plea for mercy are summarized below and explained in the pages that follow:

1. While the language Pastor Latzel used may have been shocking to some, both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions support his statements regarding the heterosexual order of God's creation, the limitation of marriage to one man and one woman united before God, and that homosexual orientations are not in accord with God's order of creation.
2. While many would label Pastor Latzel's speech harsh, it reflects the heart of Biblical preaching. The law convicts and the Gospel consoles people struggling with the burden of their sins with the message that Christ died for their sins, offers forgiveness and a new life.
3. While his language may have been judged harsh, the underlying message is protected by the BEK's constitutional mandate to assure that the "Freedom of faith, freedom of conscience and academic freedom stay unrestricted."
4. The judgement rendered against Pastor Latzel must be viewed in light of the principles expressed in Matthew 7:1-5. With all due respect, an examination of the Church Committee's judgement, and its context, reveals biases against Pastor Latzel and the orthodox theology he embraces and unfair treatment of Pastor Latzel by the church. These biases and unfair treatment compel the BEK's church council work toward reconciliation with Pastor Latzel and the St. Martini congregation and the resumption of their joint ministry.

1. In Defense of the Heterosexual Nature of Creation and Marriage and Homosexual Prohibitions.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky."²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so.²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:20-25)

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the*

ground.”²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs^[a] and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib^[b] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mark 10:6-9)

Holy Scriptures testify that God has endowed creation with a heterosexual structure and that heterosexual marriage is an integral component of that structure. The verses of Genesis 1:20-25, testify that God created and endowed every living thing on the earth with capacity to reproduce itself through the union of the male and the female of the relevant species and the mandate to be fruitful and multiply. The verses of Genesis 1:26-28, 2:20b-24 and Mark 10:6-9 testify that God created and endowed human beings with the same reproductive capacity and gave humanity the same mandate to be fruitful and multiply.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession declares and affirms that heterosexual attraction and marriage are a divine order stamped upon creation.

First, Gen. 1:28 teaches that men were created to be fruitful and that one sex should have a proper desire for the other. We are not talking about sinful lust but about so-called “natural love,” the desire which was meant to be in uncorrupted nature. This love of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance. Since this ordinance of God cannot be suspended without an extraordinary work of God, it follows that neither regulations nor vows can abolish the right to contract marriage.

Let us therefore keep this fact in mind, taught by Scripture and wisely put by the jurists: The union of man and woman is by natural right. Natural right is really divine right, because it is an ordinance divinely stamped on nature. Since only an extraordinary act of God can change this right, the right to contract marriage necessarily remains. For the natural desire of one sex for the other is an ordinance of God, and therefore it is a right; otherwise, why would both sexes have been created.¹

Solidifying the understanding of heterosexual marriage as a natural right, our Lutheran Confessions state that the church is powerless to amend, alter or change the estate of marriage as God ordained it. Specifically, Luther wrote the following in Article XI, of Part III of the Smalcald Articles: “As little as the power has been given to us or to them to make a woman out of a man or a man out of a woman or **abolish distinctions of sex altogether**, so little have they had the power to separate such creatures of God or forbid them to live together honestly in marriage.”²

The challenge to heterosexual marriage addressed by the Apology and the Smalcald Articles was the Roman Church’s ban on the marriage of Priests. The Reformers declared that scripture forbids any restraint on heterosexual marriage as ordained by God. Article XI of the Smalcald Articles declares that the Reformers would hold the same view with respect to same gender marriage. Marriage between same gender couples **abolishes the distinction between the sexes** which Article 11 declares the church is powerless to do.

Both the Old and New Testament declare that homosexual desires and behavior are contrary to God’s intent for His children and therefore sinful, specifically Leviticus 18:22, & 20:13; Deuteronomy. 23:18; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Each of these scripture passages will be addressed below.

Leviticus 18:22 “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.”

Leviticus 20:13 “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Deuteronomy 23:18 You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute[a] into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the Lord your God detests them both.

¹ Tappert, Theodore G, The Book of Concord, XXIII Apology to the Augsburg Confession, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959) Page 241 paragraph 11-12.

² Ibid Smalcald Articles, pages 315-315

At the heart of the prohibition of lying with man as one lies with a woman is that the act mixes two things that were never to be mixed. This goes against the intent of God as marked in creation. Same gender conjugal relationships are against the accounts of creation found in Genesis. In Mark 10:6-9 Jesus affirmed that God created the two sexes, male and female and planted within each sex an attraction for the opposite sex.

Leviticus 18:23 and 20:13 are important texts for understanding God's will with respect to homosexual relations for the following reasons. The prohibition of lying with a man as with a woman is absolute and unqualified. It neither identifies nor specially penalizes oppressive forms of homosexuality (rape, pederasty, or traditional prostitution). Ritual or cultic prostitution practiced by males and females is condemned and is penalized in a separate commandment found in Deuteronomy 23:18. Further, Leviticus 20:13, states that the blood will be on both their heads, meaning, there must be consent on both partner's part. The law does not punish the innocent victim of heterosexual rape. (See Deuteronomy 22:23-27)

The ordinances of Leviticus 18 apply to the Israelites and all those aliens who reside with them. The whole purpose of the Holiness Code, and Chapters 18 and 20 of said code, is to ensure that God's commandments and promises, not the prevailing culture, formed and shaped the lives of the Chosen People. *"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God."* (Leviticus 18:24, 30).

Romans: 1: 26-27 *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Paul's critique of homosexual behavior in verses Romans 1:26-27 must be viewed within the larger context of verses 18- 32. Paul begins these verses with an important declaration; specifically, that God's wrath is being revealed in this world this very day. God's wrath is a result of his judgment against the world and Paul will demonstrate that God is fully justified in that judgment. Paul wrote: *"since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."* (Romans 1:19-20) These verses declare that God's judgment cannot be based upon the ignorance of the people of the world. God's judgment must be based upon what the people know and their failure to act in accordance with that knowledge; or more properly, their suppression of that knowledge.

Gentile people do not need the book of Leviticus to see that same gender sexual relations are contrary to nature and the Creator's desire for nature; all one has to do is look at nature. The primary sex organs fit male to female and not male to male or female to female. In addition, the coming together of a male and female in a sexual union carries with it the promise of procreation and mutual stimulation and gratification. Just looking at creation points to God and His creative intent. Just looking at the human anatomy and the complementarity of the male and the female gives ample evidence of God's intent for human sexual expression.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 *Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 enumerate certain behaviors, including sexual behaviors, which cannot be part of faithful Christian living. These behaviors are so severe that engaging in this behavior can exclude one from the kingdom of God. The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 6:9 contains two words "malkoi" and "arsenokoitai," The New International Version of the Holy Bible translates "malkoi" "male prostitute" and "arsenokoitai," as "homosexual offenders." Proponents of same sex blessings argue that these words must refer to men engaged in exploitive and degrading homosexual sexual behavior, such as rape, pederasty (older men who exploit boys) and men who willingly engage in an act of prostitution with another man. They argue that Paul's understanding of homosexuality was influenced by the understandings and prejudices of the society of his day; namely, that it was an exploitive and degrading act often associated with the worship of the pagan gods. Paul's culture could not have understood homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation. Paul's culture could not possibly have conceived of the concept of two men or two women involved in a lifelong, loving, and monogamous partnership. Therefore, it is argued, you cannot use a text which prohibits exploitive relationships to prohibit homosexual sex in a loving and monogamous relationship between two men or two women. On its face, this argument seems compelling; however, this argument must be challenged on these grounds. Just as in the case of Romans 1:26-27, one must look at the context in which the verses of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 occur in an effort to

determine whether the terms “*malkoi*” and “*arsenkoitai*” have been correctly rendered or translated by the proponents of same gender marriage/blessing.

Biblical scholars contend that the word “*arsenkoitai*” literally means “bedders of males” and they translate the word as “males who take other males to bed.” Scholars contend that the term “male-bedder” is similar to and echoes Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13’s “lying with another man as one lies with a woman.” The term “bedders of males” is not a negatively charged word; it does not speak of malicious intent. It speaks of an act; namely, one man having sexual intercourse with another man. If Paul had in his mind to single out exploitative behavior he could have used words infused and charged with negative understanding, namely, the Greek word “*paidēastes*” which is translated pederast (older men who sexually exploit male youth). Paul did not; he used the generic word “male-bedder”³

In conclusion, the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions support, ungird and authorize Pastor Latzel’s statements regarding the heterosexual order of creation and marriage and his statements that homosexual relationships are not blessed by God.

2. In Defense of Biblical Preaching.

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, must be viewed in the context of what preceded them and what followed them. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, the Apostle Paul chastised and berated the members of the Corinthian church for filing lawsuits in civil courts against one another. Members in the church had accused one other of cheating. Rather than work the dispute out amongst themselves, or ask another member of the congregation to mediate the dispute, they took one another to the civil courts. Paul declared that they were lost. They were not thinking and acting with the mind of Christ. They were thinking with the mind of the world; that is, they were becoming wicked and, as a result, were in danger of becoming alienated from God by virtue of their sins. Paul reminded them that the wicked would not inherit the kingdom of God. The wicked included idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers and homosexuals.

The purpose of the Apostle’s chastisement and beratement was to declare God’s will for humanity with respect to many aspects of their lives: in business, personal life, and sexual expression. The revelation of God’s will pricks the law written on a person’s heart and convicts the person of their sin. Conviction can lead to repentance and a desire to submit to God’s will. The account of King David as set forth in 2 Samuel 11-12 illustrates these principles in action in the Old Testament.

The Prophet Nathan told David a parable that was specifically designed to arouse David’s wrath and indignation at the unjust and illegal acts of an imaginary rich man. The Prophet declared that that the parable’s imaginary man pointed to real king; the imaginary man’s acts pointed to King David’s adultery and murder; and David’s wrath and indignation for an imaginary man and his imaginary sins pointed to God’s real wrath and indignation at David’s grievous sins. The Holy Spirit had cut David to his core and laid bare his sins. He responded: “*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.*” (Psalm 51:3-4) David begged God for forgiveness and a fresh start: *Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me..... Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.*” (Psalm 51:9-10; 12-13). King David asked God to reach out and touch his heart, soul and mind. He asked God to create something new within him, a new heart, soul and mind and an upright and willing spirit to sustain him. King David’s life was radically changed and transformed by God. In the same way, Paul’s rebuke was intentionally designed to bring about conviction, contrition and repentance in the Corinthian congregation.

Following the Apostle’s words of chastisement and beratement directed toward the Corinthian congregation, came the proclamation of the Gospel. Paul reminded them of who they were and what God had previously accomplished in them: “*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*” (1 Corinthians 6:11). In Paul’s audience there were individuals who were once adulterers, slanderers, drunkards and homosexuals. However, by God’s power they were able to leave their old lives and walk in newness of life. Paul reminded them that through the preaching of the law and the Gospel, the Holy Spirit had created something new within them: a new heart, soul and mind and an upright and willing spirit to sustain them. The Holy Spirit gave some of them the ability to leave a sinful way of life. He called them to live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and not their sinful nature.

³ Gangnon, Robert JA, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice – Texts and Hermeneutics*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, (2001) Pages 312-313

These principles have undergirded Pastor Latzel's preaching and teaching. He has been widely quoted in the media for decrying, gossip, slander, adultery, drunkenness and homosexuality as serious sins that separate people from God. At the same time he preached that God, through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, can break through that wall of separation and liberate a sinner from their sin. God's condemnation of sin stands intact. God says no to sin. Yet, at the same time, God plucks a sinner from darkness and brings him/her into the light and says yes to the sinner. Pastor Latzel's preaching conforms to the Biblical model of preaching.

3. The BEK is Constitutionally Required to Protect Pastor Latzel's Theology, Conscience, Faith and Preaching.

The BEK is described in the media as a unique church body in Germany. Its member congregations embraced the Protestant Reformation from its very beginning. Unlike other members of the Evangelical Church of Germany, the BEK's president must be a lay person. The media reports that BEK's parishes enjoy a high degree of autonomy and that congregational autonomy has produced great diversity. Congregations are liberal and conservative, and embrace a Lutheran or Reformed theology. Each individual member of the BEK may freely choose which parish he/she wants to join. The BEK has enshrined this freedom in a constitutional mandate that assures that the "Freedom of faith, freedom of conscience and academic freedom stay unrestricted."

I had the distinct privilege of visiting Bremen in 2017. I attended, and gave a presentation, at St. Martini Church. I was able to tour several other of the BEK's churches. My tour of St. Stephen's Church was most enlightening. As I recall St. Stephan's church is about a twenty minute walk from St. Martini Church. These two churches are at the opposite ends of the Schachte Embankment. They are also at the opposite ends on most all important issues of faith and life. I understand that in 2007 St. Stephen's declared itself to be a 'cultural church.' The congregation's mission is to promote and facilitate a dialogue and an interaction between the church and the arts. The congregation declares that they are open to all forms of culture. They host and promote exhibitions, concerts, readings, theatre and preacher-poetry-slam. It is their vision and goal to be: "*a place for cultural experimentation and spiritual exploration.*" St. Stephan's ministry is a testament to the BEK's tolerance for diversity.

To silence Pastor Latzel, and by extension the St. Martini congregation, for following God's Word in preaching and teaching in the areas of the heterosexual order of creation and in marriage and the Biblical injunctions against homosexuality violates a sacred mandate that BEK church council must protect. Real diversity in faith and theology demands the Biblical world view proclaimed by Pastor Latzel and the St Martini congregation be protected. Diversity in faith, conscience and academics is truly preserved by Pastor Latzel's reinstatement.

4. In Support of the BEK 's Call to Examine Their Judgment Against Pastor Latzel.

Those called to denominational leadership are called to oversee the pastors in their charge, and, when necessary and appropriate, to administer discipline, which may include, suspension of the call to pastoral ministry. However, those rendering judgements are bound to consider the principles articulated by Jesus in Matthew 7:1-5.

Jesus said: "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*" (Matthew 7:1-5.)

When overseers render judgement they must confess their inability to render a just decision because of the planks in their eyes and must beseech God to remove them so that their judgement is pleasing to God and conforms to His word. With all due respect, I believe the BEK's Church Committee must consider whether the judgment of suspension against Pastor Latzel has been influenced by a pre-existing bias against Pastor Latzel, St. Martini's orthodox stance, and the orthodox theology he and his congregation support.

In support of a pre-existing bias against Pastor Latzel, St. Martini and their orthodox theology, please accept the following. The media has reported that once Bremen's prosecutor's office began investigating Pastor Latzel in the present case, representatives of the employees of the BEK made written demands for Pastor Latzel's suspension for making degrading comments about homosexuals. In an open letter to the leadership of the BEK Church Committee, its employees claimed the following about Pastor Latzel: "The intolerable hostility towards people of a different lifestyle, either from a church member or a church employee is unacceptable." Even the chairperson of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, commented on this case. He described Pastor Latzel as an intolerant man. The SPIEGEL quoted him as saying "Intolerance is against the gospel, pejorative and discriminatory attitudes must have no place in the church."

The statements made by the BEK's employees and Bishop Bedford-Strohm are based upon a common understanding about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people. BEK's employees and Bishop Bedford-

Strohm do not rely on a different Bible or a new Gospel text unearthed by archaeologists that reveal a new order of creation. The employees and Bishop Bedford-Strohm like many in and outside the church contend that homosexual desires, behavior and/or lifestyle are simply another form of sexuality equally valid with the God given male-female pattern. As stated above, a great deal of controversy exists over whether the provisions of the Old and New Testaments, which speak of homosexuality, can be viewed as a condemnation of all homosexuals and all homosexual behavior. Certain passages of the Old Testament and New Testament have been reinterpreted to condemn only non-consensual, exploitive and even criminal homosexual behavior and therefore, cannot be applied to same gendered couples involved in a committed relationship. The new order of creation therefore rests on an exegesis of Leviticus 18:22, & 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The words in the above referenced verses that refer to homosexual sexual relations are redefined to include only unhealthy, exploitative and criminal expressions of homosexual sexual relations. If these verses prohibit criminal and exploitative homosexual sexual relations, then logic and reason dictate that homosexual relations between committed homosexual couples are not comprehended and therefore prohibited by these verses. If sex between committed homosexual couples is not prohibited, logic and reason would dictate that committed homosexual relationships must be part of the created order and therefore blessed by God. Leviticus 18:22, & 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are thus rendered the equivalent of the 7th Commandment's prohibition against adultery and other provisions of the Law of Moses which confine sexual relations to heterosexual marriage. The fatal flaw in this line of reasoning is that the account of creation plainly supports a heterosexual created order and blesses loving committed heterosexual sexual relationships and erects fences (including, the 7th Commandment) which protect the loving committed heterosexual relationship that God created from exploitation, violence and criminality. There are simply no homosexual relationships in either the Old or New Testament that are held up as a godly relationships that the provisions of Leviticus 18:22, & 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 would presumably protect.

Reason and logic dictate that the theological foundation for the normalization of homosexuality requires faith and trust in exegesis and inferences drawn therefrom. If modern theologians are wrong in their reinterpretation of Leviticus 18:22, & 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, all of the inferences that flow therefrom fail and all who rely on them face great peril. Yet, this theology of normalization is given the status of bedrock theology that trumps all other views and brands all who dare preach and teach anything to the contrary as intolerant voices that must be silenced in order to preserve the Gospel. The intolerance for Pastor Latzel shown by the BEK's employees and Bishop Bedford-Strohm is on par with the intolerance Pastor Latzel is accused of. He is vilified by these voices. They demand that he be stripped of his ordination and thrown out of the church. There is no mercy for him. No one seems to challenge the intolerance shown by the leaders of the German church.

These voices demand ecclesial violence against Pastor Latzel. Strip him of his ordination and cast him out! Does this language not constitute an incitement to hatred of Pastor Latzel? By suspending Pastor Latzel the Church Committee could be interpreted as ruling on the basis of what is considered a majority "climate of opinion in the church and society" and condones opinions and statements about Pastor Latzel held by leaders and the rank and file of the church that reach to the level of the incitement to hatred against Pastor Latzel.

The BEK's Church Council's strongest foundation for the imposition of discipline is Pastor Latzel's conviction for incitement to hatred by a state court. The committee could mechanically apply its power that permits the suspension of a pastor convicted of a crime. The Church Committee is certainly entitled to take Pastor Latzel's conviction into consideration; but cannot rely unequivocally upon it for two reasons.

First, the judge's ruling is in the process of being appealed and could be overturned on appeal. If his conviction is overturned, the Committee's judgment was based on a flawed conviction. I understand it could take years for the case to be appealed.

Second, in any decision on Pastor Latzel's suspension, the Church Committee is required to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. (Mark 12:17) It was reported by [Katholisch.de](#) and [Spiegel.de](#) in articles published on November 25, 2020, that the judge "made the verdict against the background of the current 'climate of opinion.'" Pastor Latzel was found guilty of incitement by a secular judge, using secular laws. The State of Germany has normalized LGBTQ behavior and granted the right of LGBTQ couples who so desire to get married by the state. The German state's normalization of LGBTQ orientations was not based on Biblical exegesis but on secular constitutional grounds. The judge ruled on all the evidence presented. The judge ruled that while Pastor Latzel may have had a constitutional right to preach and proclaim church doctrine and theology, the manner in which he preached and proclaimed had crossed a line, in the judge's opinion. It should be noted that the judge gave Pastor Latzel a very lenient sentence, which in and of itself, testifies that Pastor Latzel's comments did not stray across the judge's line very far. As set forth under Sections 1 and 2 above, the Church Committee has the obligation to render its decision not on the

on the current "climate of opinion," but on the basis of the Word of God and the freedom of faith, conscience and theology guaranteed by the BKE's constitution.

I would like to conclude by drawing the Church Committee's attention to a widely reported remark made by Judge Best as a part of the verdict rendered against Pastor Latzel. The November 25, 2020 articles (referred to above) quoted Judge Best as saying "We should all work to ensure that we treat each other more respectfully again." Judge Best's statement is profound. She is calling the Church Committee, the people of St. Martini and Pastor Latzel to recognize that their high calling in Christ. The Church Committee's calling is to protect Pastor Latzel's and St. Martini's proclamation of the Gospel in the manner described in Sections 1 and 2 above. Pastor Latzel is called to preach and teach in way that allows him overcome the stigma of the verdict of incitement to hatred rendered against him and at the same time remain faithful to the scriptural and confessional understanding of creation and marriage and invites all people, including LGBTQ people, to repent and to be transformed by the God's power and grace. The people of St. martini are called to support and encourage Pastor Latzel in his high calling in Christ.

These high callings in Christ are daunting and seem impossible to fulfill. The good news is that the fulfillment of these high callings is in God's hands. We are called to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift us up. (James 4:10). I am confident that God will give you all the strength, wisdom and courage to work together and accomplish your high callings in Christ.

Please place the most charitable construction on all that I have said. Do not hesitate contacting the undersigned if you have any questions or I could be of assistance in any way.

In Christ

Pastor Ed Skutshek, President