

\*Letter edited for publication to CHOGAffirm website

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General Director Lyon:

I am prompted to write today after further reflection on the 1993 Resolution on Homosexuality and the reaffirmation of the church's position in 2014.

I am concerned about the church of God whose stance on the unity of all believers, "we reach our hand in fellowship to every blood washed one" was one of the basic convictions of the church has been seriously compromised by these Resolutions and "hard line" enforcement of them in this moment of our church history.

Maybe I can explain it best by telling you my story as it relates to the church's stance on unity. I was ordained in South Dakota in June of 1965. I attended my first GA meeting in 1964 and saw the breadth of thought, theological diversity, and the differences in the way various people in the church viewed Biblical inspiration. I heard the likes of Lilly Mccutchen with strongly held conservative convictions and church leaders such as Dr. Val Clear and Dr. Robert Reardon who voiced a more "liberal" set of convictions. The dialog was refreshing, stimulating, and for me, so very important and fortunate to have a range of persons, "blood washed ones" almost at polar opposite places speaking into the life of the movement enriching the movement.

In the middle to late 80's I began meeting with concerned persons whose desire was to understand and stand beside homosexual people in our church who had been relegated to either a persona-non-grata status, or second class citizenship in the church that had always accepted every blood washed one. Then in 1993 two significant experiences made me very sad. The church through the GA passed a resolution declaring a position for the church and it's "agencies" that called the church to take the position that homosexuality was a condition contrary to the Bible. I rose with one Anderson University board member to present a substitute resolution pleading with the church to give the matter careful study before adopting a position of being anti-gay. The two of us were subjected to a rumbling on the G.A. floor of discontent and derision and treated with less than brotherly love by the chair. The summer of 1993 was also the time our 22 year old son, short term missionary to Egypt and with one year of seminary under his belt, came to us and told us what I suspected for some time; that he was gay. Not wanting to be a problem for his minister father he moved shortly after his announcement to Chicago. In the 1990s, I had some family members come out to me as gay. General Director Lyon you have talked about how welcoming MP was to homosexual men and women. The church of the "blood washed ones" doesn't have any second class or "outer court" of the Gentiles. Most church of God congregations will welcome my gay family members to the "outer court," but they will never be welcomed as "brother or sister in Christ".

I knew about the prohibition against marrying same sex couples and the mandatory loss of credentials, because I was on a State Ministry committee, working hard to create a document that would help teams who would be working with victims and victimizers of sexual abuse within the church. This brings us to 2014 and a resolution that affirmed the 1993 resolution and also mandated that the National Office in concert with the State offices would send a letter to every ordained minister reaffirming the 1993 resolution, with suggested legal changes in by-laws that would protect a church if sued, and the reiteration that any minister in the movement who chose to wed a same-sex couple would lose their ordination.

I realize that every institution has the need and right to set boundaries and that includes the church of God. So, I cannot argue that what the church has done with the boundaries it has established concerning Homosexuality is "out of order."

From where I sit right now what I see is a church who's seeking of "new light" and more vitality of thought and ministry has been severely diminished.

For every Bill Soetenga you can be assured there are 100's who love the church and hopefully have helped the church in leadership over the last half a Century who could not be ordained today. Maybe our contribution to our movement really wasn't very helpful or needed. Much more importantly some of our best and finest men and women preparing for ministry are going to have to choose between being dishonest with their Ordaining Board or choose to go with their intellect, spiritual integrity, and significant gifts to another church body.

The movement is losing a great deal when the boundary is set inside Val Clear and his ilk leaving them (us) on the outside looking in.

I would hope that when the GA meets again in June of 2015 and gives further consideration to the "Resolutions" and their ramifications they will seek out more than one ordained person who is prepared to speak to the underlying issues propping up our stance on homosexuality. Issues such as: Biblical interpretation, and our reluctance to accept the best thinking and evidence of psychology, sociology, and biology. Have this discussion for the preservation of the unity of the church, for those of us who are now on the outside looking in, and the many young people seeking to pour out their lives for Christ within the context of the church of God who now are not likely to be ordained if their views on Homosexuality do not fit the church of God criteria.

May the peace of God be with you,

Bill Soetenga (retired CHOG minister)

CC: Dr.Doug Talley