

# The Brief Story of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, North Vancouver, BC

## Our History

Mount Olivet Lutheran Church (ELCIC) used to form a federation with St. Mark's Lutheran Church (LCMS). Even though both St. Mark's and Mount Olivet had their own church councils. All aspects of worship and common life had become seamless. Responding to this reality, the two congregations voted overwhelmingly to dissolve the Federation Agreement and become the ELCIC parish of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church (MOLC) effective September 29, 2002. On September 1, 2006, Pastor Alan Lai came to serve MOLC. Prior to being the pastor of MOLC, Pastor Lai was Assistant Professor of Religious Education at Vancouver School of Theology. MOLC celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on October 22, 2006.



Some might expect MOLC to be a conservative congregation because of the presence of the Missouri-Synod folks. But that is not the case, MOLC is an open-minded congregation and none of the church members think like the Missouri-Synod folks. It can be illustrated by their courageous act to call Pastor Alan Lai to be their pastor. This call and Pastor Lai's subsequent acceptance makes MOLC the only Caucasian ELCIC congregation whose pastor is a first-generation immigrant of Asian descent. Not only that, for more than ten years MOLC has had a Japanese family from Japan as the church musicians. The Maeda family plays for the church faithfully almost every Sunday. MOLC also has Chinese and Korean families. The current Sunday school Superintendent is a Chinese woman. Two other Sunday school teachers

are of Chinese descent. On some Sundays, Monta Maeda, one of our musicians serves as Assistant Minister while the rest of his family plays keyboard and trumpets. If one looks from the pews, s/he sees an all-Asian team (Pastor, Assistant Minister and musicians) leading Lutheran worship in a Caucasian Lutheran church! Also living in Greater Vancouver, people of MOLC are exposed to the diversity of culture, language and people around the world, the idea of the full inclusion of GLBT people is well received.

## The Process:

In both the 2005 and 2007 ELCIC national convention when the National Church Council presented motions that concerned the matter of same-gender blessing, delegates from MOLC supported both motions. Upon returning from the 2007 convention, Pastor Alan Lai decided to write a Welcome Statement for the church as he constantly heard the opponents of the motion say they did not have problems in welcoming GLBT people. Their objection was mainly about same-gender blessing. However, true welcoming needs actions, not just words. In order to



explain why welcoming GLBT people is the call of the Gospel, Pastor Lai wrote a 13-page essay entitled: *Saying Yes to the Gospel: A Pastoral and Theological Rationale for Welcoming GLBT People*. Dr. Harold Remus of Waterloo, Ontario has kindly reviewed and offered suggestions for the document. The final edition of the Welcome Statement and the essay were distributed to all church council members in late August. On September 2, 2007. The Spiritual Growth Committee, which is the committee responsible for most of the ministry at MOLC, discussed and approved the materials for presentation in the next council meeting. On September 11, 2007, the church council discussed and adopted the

Welcome Statement and all voted in favor to become a member of the *Reconciling in Christ* program. The vote was unanimous. On September 16, 2007, Pastor Lai announced the decision of the council to the congregation and everyone received a copy of the Welcome Statement and his essay. The following Tuesday morning Bible Study, the participants expressed agreement and thanks for this initiative.

The Chair and Pastor Lai are confident that the spirit of this congregation has no problem in accepting this Welcome Statement. Since the Welcome Statement and the decision to join RIC is about welcoming not marriage, they both feel positive that the elected officials could decide this issue on behalf of the congregation as they based their rationale on their understanding of Lutheran theology and the Bible. On top of that, this Welcome Statement is a reflection of what this congregation has already believed and practiced. Like one of the church council members says, "When we say we welcome everyone, we mean everyone, period." Another member says, "God is love so I shall love, welcome and embrace all people." In the essay, Pastor Lai says,

Not all GLBT persons desire marriage nor want to be part of a church. We are talking about a small group of people within the GLBT community who desire God to be part of their lives. When they come, is it not a sign to us that God has worked in their hearts? For these people to show up at our doors, there is no convincing theological rationale not to treat them equally as one of God's redeemed children who deserve to be welcomed just like everyone else.

Please read our Welcome Statement and *Saying Yes to the Gospel: A Pastoral and Theological Rationale for Welcoming GLBT People* on our website: <http://www.mtolivet.ca>

Submitted by Pastor Alan Lai

