

Joint Diaconate and Session Meeting
July 26, 2015

Opening Unison Prayer:

Everlasting God, in whom we live and move and have our being: You have made us for yourself, so that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Give us purity of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will, no weakness keep us from doing it; that in your light we may see clearly, and in your service find perfect freedom.

We pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for we offer our prayer in the strong name of Jesus Christ your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Scripture Reading: **Romans 1:18-32**

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, **19** since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. **20** 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. **21** For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. **25** They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. **27** 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.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. **29** They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, **30** slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; **31** they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. **32** Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Context:

The context is the wrath of God, not as the final judgment, but as the anticipation of that final judgment, which happens regularly throughout the historical process. Paul is saying that God has made knowledge and truth about God's-self available to all people in the created world. Human beings in their foolish and willful self-interest have rejected this truth and therefore exist with minds that are dark, senseless and futile. God's reaction to this universal rebellion – God's wrath – is that God turns people over to the consequences of their own actions. God allows the human mind to be darkened. God allows the foolish human choice as a part of His divine determination. Thus, ***homosexuality is something to which people are given over to by God***, and ***which is also chosen*** by human beings. This is the only time in which women are also included in the conversation of homosexuality.

Break up into small groups of 4 (2 elders and 2 deacons)

In your small group:

1. Paul says, "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*" Do you believe all people are generally good or bad? On what basis do you make your claim?
2. Paul says, "*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another... Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.*" Why do you think God gave them over to these things?
3. What do you consider to be natural sexual relations? What do you consider to be unnatural? What is our created sexual orientation? Explain.
4. They chose not to retain the knowledge of God so God gave them over to a depraved mind. Why do you think Paul is so explicit in speaking about homosexual relations and not talking more about the other forms of wickedness he mentions?
5. Close your group time in prayer together.