

29 July 2003

We welcome the NCCS statement as a united attempt by churches in Singapore to bring into check the current combative and homophobic campaign being carried out by some churches here. We thank the NCCS for affirming the basic human dignity of each gay Singaporean. We affirm the right and obligation of the NCCS churches to form their own moral convictions based on a careful and prayerful study of the Bible.

However there are many Christians and an increasing number of denominations globally including segments of the Methodist and Anglican denominations who disagree with the position of the NCCS regarding homosexuality. These individuals and churches having read the Scriptures carefully bearing in mind the Spirit of Christ, believe that the Christian faith can and does affirm that gay Christians may live fully as Christians and as gay people. For these Christians and for us, there is no theological or spiritual conflict. We call upon the NCCS to recognise the existence of this diversity even within global Christianity. It is this ability to allow and nurture diverse views that has enabled the Christian faith to thrive over two millenia.

The faith we share with the NCCS is a faith that calls each individual into accountability with God. Each Christian is called to work out his own moral and ethical position and be responsible for his or her life. The affirmation of the human dignity of the gay person means that the NCCS must also affirm the right and obligation for each person, gay or otherwise, to work through their own moral position based on their understanding of the Bible. In affirming the dignity and humanity of the gay person, the NCCS cannot impose their views on those who would believe otherwise. In a pluralistic and cosmopolitan society like Singapore we need to respect each other's space to grow and contribute to this nation in our own unique ways.

We wish to remind the NCCS and ourselves that the Christian faith is but one of many faiths in our nation, which clearly lays down the principle of the separation of church and state. To call upon the state to legislate private morality runs against this fundamental principle that has stood the test of time not only in Singapore but elsewhere. As a secular state, Singapore needs to take into account all factors that will contribute to the continued viability of Singapore as a socio-economic entity. The need to embrace diversity

and tolerance is now becoming an urgent matter of national interest if Singapore is to continue succeeding in the new millenium.

As it stands today, the United States, Canada and Britain have established that gay people have the right to live out their lives without undue inteference from the state. Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan are among some of the East Asian economies that do not criminalise homosexual behaviour and each has thriving gay communities. We do not see any evidence of moral decay in these nations. It is time for segments of the Singaporean Christian community to drop the gay bogeyman so that Singapore can catch up with the rest of the developed world.

In associating acceptance with a 're-ordering' of society, the NCCS statement ignores the fact that gay Singaporeans have contributed, are contributing and will continue to contribute to the wellbeing of their families, their faith communities as well as their nation. There is no need for any radical reshaping of our society, but simply to acknowledge and accept that these citizens deserve their rightful place like the rest of us, in this diverse fabric that makes up Singapore.

The NCCS's stand of homosexuality could be viewed as somewhat hypocritical. If the NCCS wishes to call upon the Government to stop consensual homosexual sex between adults and the restrict the right of gay men and women to live fulfilled lives, consistency requires that the NCCS takes similar public positions on abortion, adultery and divorce. For the NCCS not to publicly call upon the Government to legislate against these and restrict the right of individuals to make informed choices for themselves is an exercise of double standards. We note that on the matters of divorce, adultery and arguably abortion, the Bible's prohibitions are significantly clearer compared to its position on homosexuality.

However in the midst of this unnecessary furore, we discern an emerging light. Since the statement made by PM Goh in Time magazine, many gay men and women have been quietly and not so quietly coming out to their friends and families. We have seen people come out to their entire circle of friends. People in sensitive positions have come out to their human resource managers. People have come out to their churches. Many have written to the PM to express their heartfelt thanks at his enlightened and courageous stand. And in all these cases, bonds have been

strengthened. New respect and dignity have emerged. It is not on polemics and moralising statements that this nation is built but in these everyday courageous actions. Each of these men and women makes Singapore a more creative, tolerant and diverse society - a nation in which each of us - gay, straight, male, female, religious, or otherwise - can truly call our home. ■