

How Does Marriage Matter?



As Lutherans, we believe that marriage is a vocation that strengthens couples, their families, and the community. It's both a way for God to do God's work in people's lives and a way for people to do God's work in the world. It's a way for married couples and their families to mirror, as best they can, God's total love for the world.

We believe that whenever the security and legal protections of marriage, as well as the spiritual support of the faith community, is denied, it hurts committed couples and families.

Marriage matters for gay and lesbian couples for the same reasons as everyone else. They believe marriage is about committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other.

In what follows, several Lutheran couples and families witness to how marriage matters to them.

What Does the ELCA Social Statement Say About Marriage?

In adopting *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, the ELCA has committed to allowing for an understanding of marriage that includes same-gender couples. Further, it has committed to allowing practices within the life of the church which uphold such couples in prayer and which encourage legal commitments that can include marriage. ELCA pastors may preside over same-gender marriages where they are not prohibited by civil law.

The following are some frequently asked questions, with relevant excerpts from the ELCA social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*.

What is the definition of marriage provided in the social statement?

“Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God.”

How does the statement describe what has been recognized in the past?

“The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10: 6–9: ‘But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to

his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.”

Where in the text does the social statement allow for other understandings of marriage?

“Recognizing that this conclusion differs from the historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions, some people, though not all, in this church and within the larger Christian community, conclude that marriage is also the appropriate term to use in describing similar benefits, protection, and support for same-gender couples

The Eck-Mitchell Family

Everyone in this world has two families: the family we are born with and the family we make. Our biological family is only the beginning of the journey. Along the way, we form deep friendships, fall in love, and perhaps have children and grandchildren. This “new” family is the family of our choosing. With love and commitment, with wise choices, this new family becomes a tremendous blessing in our lives.

I am fortunate to have an amazing “new” family. My husband Gary and I have been together for nineteen years. We fostered two children, one of whom is about to make me a grandfather for the first time. I also have an amazing group of friends who have supported my family in good times and in bad.

Like everyone else, I would do anything to protect my family. Unfortunately I cannot give

them all the legal protection under the law that my straight friends can. Gary and I have done our best to craft legal documents to protect our family, but I have learned that these efforts sometimes fall short.

For example, while the ELCA covers my husband’s health insurance as my same-sex partner, the money used to pay for this policy has to be declared as income on my tax form. Therefore, I pay a big chunk of tax money to cover his medical expenses that most of my straight friends do not have to pay. Now, we all know that when it comes to our families, it’s not really about the money—it’s about being able to provide protection and security for our loved ones. But because of what my state government has decreed, it’s more difficult for my family to take care of and be responsible for each other.

And all the money in the world would not have helped me when my daughter broke her ankle a few years back; because I’m not considered her “real” father, I had trouble getting medical information. For a while, I was helpless to help her. Luckily, thanks to some wonderful individuals on the hospital staff, we were able to work around this. But it could have easily gone the other way. I am terrified at what could have happened had she been taken to a different hospital for a more serious medical problem.

Marriage equality matters to my family. We’re not different than any other family. We love and care for each other, and we simply want to do that with the same security and protections that are afforded everyone else.

David and Gary are members of Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Fairview, North Carolina, where David also serves as pastor.



Standing, from left: Michael Dawn Martoccio, Rev. David Eck, Jason Kindel; seated: Gary Mitchell and Buddy the dog

The Morse-Wendt Family

When my wife Michelle and I held our wedding at the church I serve as Mission and Ministry Developer, Edina Community Lutheran Church, just two years ago, I didn't think I could love her any more than I did in that moment. Surrounded by a church full of family and friends and supported by the

Michelle and Lauren Morse-Wendt, with the Rev. Pam Fickenscher of Edina Community Lutheran, Edina, Minnesota, presiding.



congregation that we love, our wedding day seemed like the pinnacle of our relationship: our vow before God and community for our life together.

But, over the last eight months I have learned how much love can grow. Since we discovered that we are expecting our first

child, we have both been in awe of our love for this little being within and in awe of the deeper love we have for each other as we imagine each other as parents.

Now, our Saturdays are filled with researching the safest car seat, plugging electrical sockets, choosing the most secure crib, and dozens of other ways to protect our child as he enters the world.

As we create a world of care and safety for our son, we know we cannot fully protect him while the state of Minnesota denies same gender couples legal marriage. Because of current state laws, I will endure an expensive court process to adopt our son. Until then, I will have no legal rights over our child; should he need my protection before the adoption, I will not legally be able to provide it. My love for my son is already endless, and yet I know I cannot fully protect him because of our state laws. Unless we defeat the constitutional amendment in November, it will only get more difficult for my family to care for and protect each other.

As we await our little boy's birth, we also await the verdict of the people of Minnesota. Will my state recognize our family as the loving, committed Minnesotans that we are? And, as we welcome this newest little Minnesotan, will the community help us fully to protect him, as we seek to protect all children?

Lauren and Michelle are members of Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota, where Lauren also serves as a Diaconal Minister for Mission and Ministry Development.

entering into lifelong monogamous relationships.” [page 18 of printed version]

The social statement explicitly lists four different views that are to be “acknowledged” by this church. And not only are they to be acknowledged, the social statement requires that the ELCA “will include” these different practices within the life of the ELCA. The fourth item in that list reads as follows:

“We further believe that this church, on the basis of the bound conscience, will include [the following] understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world: ... On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when

same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage. They surround such couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe same-gender couples should avail themselves of social and legal support for themselves, their children, and other dependents and seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.” [pages 19–20 of printed version, emphasis added]

As of March 2012, in what states is marriage the highest level of legal accountability available for all couples?

Connecticut, District of Columbia, Iowa, Maryland (beginning January 2013), Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington (beginning June 2012).

Why Aren't "Civil Unions" Enough?

Marriage "alternatives" do not provide the same protections.

There have been attempts to create marriage-like relationship systems (e.g., civil unions and domestic partnerships), but they don't provide the same security, protections, or dignity as marriage. In many states, gay and lesbian couples that have domestic partnerships have been barred from a dying partner's bedside, and denied the ability to say goodbye to the person they love. States with civil unions report that, in practice, civil union laws don't result in

equal protections but instead imply a second-class status. (For example, see, "Civil unions called second-class status," *Sun Journal* (New Jersey) February 17, 2008 www.sunjournal.com/node/99192)

Marriage is about proclaiming love and commitment before friends, family, and church.

Although civil unions and domestic partnerships may be intended to provide equal rights to gay and lesbian couples, the reality is that nothing is equal to marriage

but marriage. To be sure, people want to see equality and fairness in how society distributes rights and benefits. But those wishing to marry don't do so simply to achieve those rights and benefits. Just like everyone else, gay and lesbian people want to get married so they can stand up in front of their friends and families—and, in the case of people of faith, their church—and proclaim their love for and commitment to one another. Couples want the stability and recognition that comes with marriage, and they want the dignity and joy that public

The Mapstone-Knamm Family

Growing up gay in Pennsylvania was not a happy childhood. The Lutheran Church, a mainstay in my life, continually told me that all I felt was wrong and I would be damned to Hell. I kept praying to God to banish those feelings, and yet they remained. After graduating from Thiel College, I left Pennsylvania for California where I had hoped for a better environment for people like me. I

Barry James Knamm and James H. Mapstone-Knamm

was wrong. The church there had the same unbending attitude. I then tried New York City... and suicide. Fortunately I was not very good at it and I survived to struggle on.

I next sought refuge in the Boston area, where I met Barry, and found my soul mate. The Catholic Church had been an important part of Barry's childhood, but he too had left his church due to its attitude towards people

like us. We became distanced from religion to the point of questioning our faith, and whether a church would or could ever fit into our life together. For twenty years we lived within this suspension of faith, denying ourselves the strength that group worship brings to individual members of a congregation.

It was only after finding Saint Paul Lutheran Church and the help of Pastor Dan Carlson that we were able to come back to the church and our beliefs held so dear since childhood. However, due to the attitudes that prevail in many of our churches, we nearly lost the great gift of faith. You see, were it not for Pastor Dan and many members of the congregation, we would have lost our belief in Christ, and thus our very salvation. Pastor Dan and the congregation restored to us the most precious gift one could ever give: the faith in Jesus Christ as our personal savior and the gift of eternal life.

The highlight of our life came eight years ago, after 35 years together. We were able to be married in our church and stand before God and in front of our friends and fellow church members to pledge our undying love and commitment to each other. Our lives have never been the same. It has made a difference. It is such a privilege to live in this part of the county where the church can be a wonderful, supporting part of our family. It is our greatest wish that all people everywhere could live within the church as we are able to do. We have been so blessed. Our heartfelt thanks go out to the members of St. Paul, its Pastors Reverend Ross Goodman and Reverend Susan Henry, Reverend Dan Carlson, Bishop Margaret Payne, and the New England Synod. They are the face of Christ. Thanks be to God!

Jim and Barry are members of Saint Paul Lutheran Church in Arlington, Massachusetts.



The Engquist-Lipke Family

On our wedding day at University Lutheran Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts, we spoke these vows in the presence of assembled congregation members, friends, and family:

Kari, I love you. Joanne, I love you.

Today I join my life to yours in a covenant of marriage.

These things I promise:

I will be faithful to you and honest with you.

I will respect, trust, help, and care for you.

I will try to forgive you as we have been forgiven.

As long as we live,
in all of life's joys, sorrows, and ordinary moments,
I will try with you
to deepen compassion and understanding
for ourselves, the world, and God.

In married life we live in accord with these vows, grounded in gratitude for God's grace and responsive to God's desire that we love and serve our neighbors. All who witnessed our promises support and encourage us in our vocation as spouses, but so also do people in the general public who honor our commitments as a married couple within society.

Pr. Barbara Lundblad's sermon at our marriage service drew enthusiastic response when she proclaimed, "We come together to bless the two of you, to bless two women who in the past were not usually blessed. Blessed is your love, and blessed your commitment.

Blessed is your marriage—legalized by the state of Massachusetts; blessed by the Lutheran Church."

Strengthened by such blessing, we trust that the day is near when remaining legislative and ecclesiastical barriers to such life-giving commitments will fall away. And we pray that you will carry the Spirit's transforming energy into your homes and communities as advocates who protect and

uphold relationships like ours.

Joanne is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. She is originally from California, and has served calls in Maine and Massachusetts. Kari is a candidate for ordained ministry of word and sacrament in her home synod, Southwest Minnesota. She is serving her internship at St. John United Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington.

Kari Lipke and the Rev. Joanne Elise Engquist



acceptance can bring. They want to talk about their husband or wife and have people easily and simply understand the value of that relationship.

Imagine if the tables were turned.

In its decision that it is unconstitutional to deny the right to marry, the Connecticut Supreme Court agreed that "If the tables were turned, very few heterosexuals would countenance being told that they could enter only civil unions and that marriage is reserved for lesbian and gay couples." The court recognized that, if told they had to trade in their marriage for a civil union, straight couples would feel they had "lost something precious and irreplaceable." The court concurred that "Surely there is [a] constitutional injury when the majority imposes on the minority that which it would not accept for itself." Gay and lesbian

couples want the freedom to make the same types of choices that others are allowed to make without government interference.

Separate is not equal.

Although civil unions can be helpful to secure some protections, such structures create a two-tiered system, where some couples are separated from others in regard to relationship status. While the intended benefits offered by each model may look similar on paper, the reality is far different. As was stated by the U. S. Supreme Court in the landmark 1954 case *Brown vs. Board of Education*: Separate is not equal.

Marriage is not merely about benefits and protections. The freedom to marry is also a characteristic of what it means to be a full-fledged citizen. As stated in *Loving vs. Virginia* in 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court noted that "the freedom to marry has long

been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness...."

In other words, civil unions have the effect of legalizing gay and lesbian couples as second-class citizens, and thus may invite other forms of second-class treatment and discrimination within our communities.

What Is the Role of the Church in Public Affairs?

What does the ELCA teach?

The ELCA teaches that the “baptismal vocation of Christians” includes “being wise and active citizens. . . . Along with all citizens, Christians have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being, and good order in public life. They are to recognize the vital role of law in protecting life and liberty and in upholding the common good. Christians need to be concerned for the methods and the content

of public deliberation. They should be critical when groups of people are inadequately represented in political processes and decisions that affect their lives.”

“An important way that Christians carry out their citizenship is through participation in voluntary associations and movements, both religious and secular. At times, these groups may serve a prophetic function as they protest particular evils, question unexamined assumptions, challenge unjust

or immoral practices, and organize for structural changes in the workplace, local community, and wider world.”

In “witnessing as an institution,” the ELCA has committed to:

“encourage congregations and affiliated institutions to engage in ministries that promote the well-being of the human community and the environment and that empower people to gain access to and influence in the systems that govern their lives;”

The Irvin-Janson Family

Leon and Meredith, a man and a woman we know, recently got married. Like us, they found each other later in life. Their joy over getting married is palpable, it’s written all over their faces. More than once we’ve told them we know their joy, we experienced it when we got married.

On April 25, 1998, we exchanged marriage vows in our church, St. Francis Lutheran in San Francisco. Our marriage at St. Francis was not recognized as legal or valid, but it was important to us to make our lifelong

commitment to each other before God in the context of a worship service.

We entered the church as the congregation sang, *Joyful, joyful*. . . . Our community was celebrating with us. We are grateful to our God that we discovered our love and were able to have our commitment to each other honored by our families, friends, colleagues, congregation and pastors. As part of our vows, the congregation pledged to support us throughout our lives together. What a gift! Our marriage at St. Francis, as it is lived out

day by day, continues as an “ode to joy.”

It was the same for Linda and Bill and Cindy and Rick. We often talked about our shared experience of having a life partner with whom we are very well suited . . . someone we love and like, who shares our values . . . a great partner with whom to experience the joys and difficulties, the ordinariness of everyday life. When Bill died and more recently Rick, we could well imagine the loss for Linda and Cindy.

In February of 2004, Mayor Gavin Newsom opened the doors of San Francisco City Hall to gays and lesbians who wished to be married. Of course, we got married at City Hall, but we thought the “legal marriage” would be anticlimatic, given the opportunity we had to be married in our church. We discovered with surprise the effect this legal recognition had on us. By way of a 10-minute ceremony conducted by a commissioned official of the City and County of San Francisco, we were officially recognized and made legal, just like everyone else who gets married. Our 2004 marriage was later declared null and void, but in 2008 California offered us another opportunity, so, of course, we got married again!

So far, our 2008 marriage is still legally valid, and we hope it remains so. Our marriage at St. Francis included a poem, which concludes with words from poet Adrienne Rich:

and somehow, each of us will help the other live, and somewhere, each of us must help the other die.

When Linda’s husband, Bill, was dying of cancer and in and out of hospitals, there was no question that Linda could be with him, to care for him and help him die, and, if necessary, make decisions. We hope the same will be true for us.

Mari and Jeannine live in Yachats, Oregon.



Mari Irvin and Jeannine Janson

The Swanson-Ballinger Family

Our home state of Minnesota is considering whether to put a ban on marriage for same-gender couples in the state constitution. We believe that would be bad for families and wrong for Minnesota. The desire of any two people to enter into marriage is something to celebrate, not something to condemn.

Our names are Javen Swanson and Oby Ballinger. Oby serves as pastor at Community United Church of Christ in St. Paul Park, and Javen is preparing for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We strongly urge you to oppose the proposed constitutional amendment limiting marriage as only between one man and one woman.

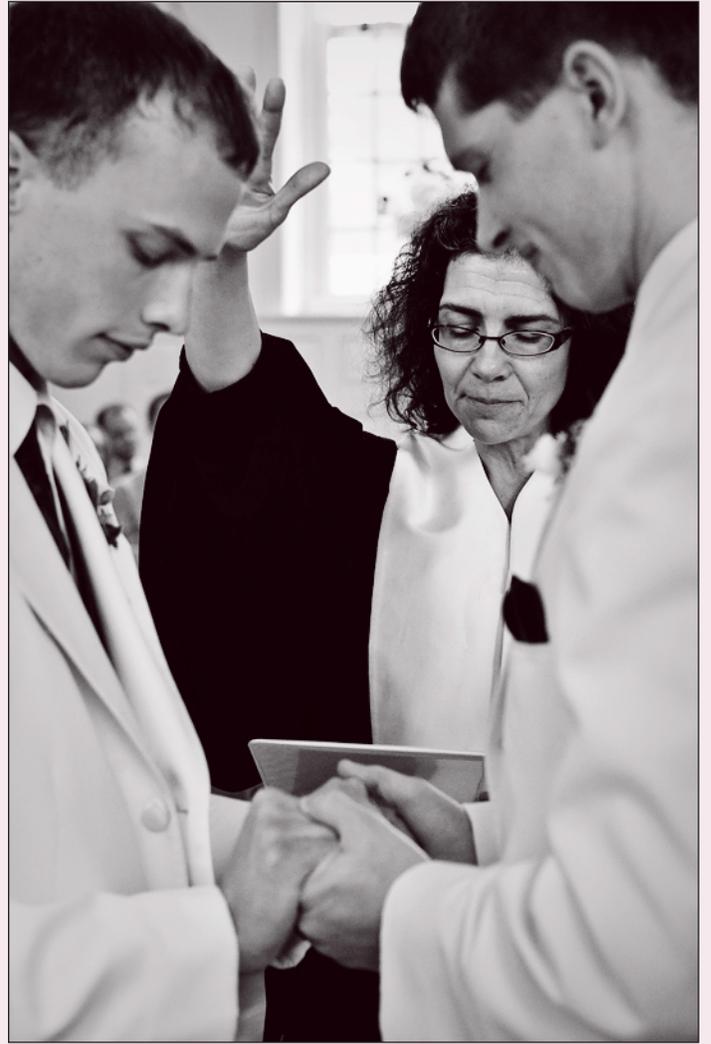
We were both born and raised in Minnesota but met as students at Yale Divinity School in Connecticut. On May 22, 2009, we were married in the Divinity School chapel. Surrounded by friends and family, in the presence of God, we made sacred vows to love and honor one another in sickness and in health, when times are good and when things get tough. We made a public promise of responsibility for each other and asked our loved ones to support us and hold us accountable.

We married for the same reasons heterosexual couples marry, and we want what any married couple wants: the opportunity to live into the promises we have made, and the legal rights and protections that will allow our family to flourish. We may look different from other couples, but we share similar values. We believe in the importance of family and serving our community. We worry about making ends meet and finding time for one another. We dream of one day raising children and we hope to grow old together.

Marriage is about love and commitment, faithfulness and accountability. We hope Minnesota will one day take our relationship as seriously as we do.

Javen is a member of First Lutheran Church in Pine River, Minnesota. Oby is pastor of Community United Church of Christ in St. Paul Park, Minnesota.

Javen Swanson and the Rev. Oby Ballinger, with the Rev. Maria LaSala of First Presbyterian, New Haven, Connecticut, presiding



“speak out on timely, urgent issues on which the voice of the church should be heard;”

“work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of creation;”

[From the ELCA social statement, *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, adopted in 1991.]

Can congregations and synods take a public stance on ballot initiatives, referendums, or other legislation without losing their tax-exempt status?

Yes. Almost all congregations, and lots of other non-profit organizations, are designated as 501(c)(3) and are tax-exempt. Under 501(c)(3), churches and other non-profit organizations *are allowed* to speak out on ballot initiatives, public referendums, and other pending legislation. There are certain limitations regarding how much time and money can be spent on such projects, but almost no congregation or synod would ever come close to exceeding those limitations.

However, churches are not allowed to advocate for a particular political *candidate* or political party.

Source: IRS webpage on “Charities, Churches, and Politics.”
<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=161131,00.html>

Marriage Is How Society Says You Are a Family

Marriage is the way that loving couples in our society make a commitment to one another. In marriage, a couple makes a public promise of love and responsibility for each other and asks their friends and family to hold them accountable. Same-gender couples share the same values as straight couples, such as the importance of family and serving the neighbor. They have the same sort of

worries, such as making ends meet or finding stable and meaningful employment. And they have the same sort of hopes and dreams, like growing old in the company of a loving companion.

This document was prepared by Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA). Working at the intersection of oppressions, LC/NA embodies, inspires, advocates and organizes for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners.

For more information about how Marriage Matters, see www.lcna.org and click on the Marriage Matters tab.

The Urrutia-Selland Family

In 2006, Dirk proposed to Henry in the romantic city of Venice, Italy, while sitting in St. Mark's Square listening to classical music and sharing a bottle of *vino*. A year later, we were married in Baltimore, Maryland, in a beautiful outdoor ceremony on the water. As the sun was setting, with a string quartet playing *Canon in D* by Pachelbel and the pastor standing smiling in front of a beautifully decorated arch, we processed down the aisle for our wedding. Standing before God and a gathering of two hundred of our family and friends was a testament to the universality of love, a powerful reminder that true love transcends convention and creates genuine courage.

Our dream has always been to raise a child together and expand our family. Through prayers, patience, and fortitude, our beautiful daughter, Cameron Dalarie Selland, was born on October 7, 2008. Holding her in our arms at the hospital nursery was such a soothing joy that cannot be measured conventionally. Cameron is our very energetic, kind, loving, funny, and curious daughter who loves cruising in her stroller, dancing to music, swimming at the pool, building sand castles at the beach, and playing with her toys and books.

Though our family lifestyle may closely resemble that of Harry and Sally across the street, or that of David and Sue's family down the block, a closer look would show otherwise. When Dirk was hospitalized due to his heart, there was no legal document that allowed Henry to take leave from his job under the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act to provide care, since that law applies only to married couples. While we certainly can name each other in a will or a power of attorney, even these documents remain vulnerable to challenges in court. As a U.S. Judge, Dirk knows first-hand the importance of legal documents, but there is none that can extend Social Security survivor benefits or the right to inherit a retirement plan to Henry without severe tax burdens that stem from being unmarried in the eyes of the law.

Now that Henry is a stay-at-home Dad for our daughter Cameron and our future children, such financial protections are very important. It's also important for Henry, like any other stay-at-home parent, to be on his spouse's health insurance plan. Yet, while Dirk's employer, the federal government, offers health insurance to employees with different-sex spouses, they refused to offer it to Henry since they do not recognize our marriage. Thus we have to purchase health insurance separately for Henry—an unfair and very costly action. We also end up paying much higher taxes than we would as a married couple.

But this is not first about money. It's much more profound, and simpler, than that. We

married one another because we are in love and want to spend the rest of our life together. We wish to honor our relationship in the deepest way our society and church has to offer, by making a public commitment before God to stand together in good times and bad, through all the joys and challenges family life brings. Additionally, as loving parents, we wanted to legally marry because we know it offers Cameron and our future children a vital safety net and guarantees protections that unmarried parents simply cannot provide.

Dirk, Henry, and Cameron are members of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dirk Selland, Henry Urrutia-Selland, and Cameron Dalarie Selland

