

The Top Five Things I Miss When Lutherans Talk about Sex

[Martha Ellen Stortz](#)

Martha Ellen Stortz is a Professor of Historical Theology and Ethics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

[1] In the cult classic "High Fidelity" (Stephen Frears, 2000), John Cusack plays the beleaguered Rob, a record store owner who trades equally in classic tunes and romantic fantasy. He and his loser employees spend a great deal of time coming up with soundtracks for all the important events in their lives - "Top Five Songs" about death, unrequited love, etc. Music shields them from having to feel anything.

[2] When Rob fumbles the first real relationship he's ever had, he finds himself caught. On one hand, he struggles to change behavior that led to the split; on the other, he defaults to a familiar distancing mechanism. Instead of initiating conversation, he dreams up a soundtrack for the breakup: "The Top Five Things I Miss About Laura." I intend to take Rob's cue, and I invite you to do the same. Here are "The Top Five Things I Miss When Lutherans Talk About Sex."

1. Distinctively Theological Discourse:

[3] For all of our reputed shyness Lutherans talk a lot about sex. I worry about the tenor of those conversations and the categories we use to have them. The sexuality wars are every bit as loaded as the culture wars, and they are waged in terms like "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality," and bold other categories the churches don't even want to think about: "bi-sexuality" and "transgendered." We debate "identity" and "orientation;" we worry about "behavior" and "practice" and "lifestyle:"

- we speak of *identity* in terms that sound like ordering sandwiches: LGBT;
- we define *orientation* in terms of the gender of the people with whom one most often practices;
- we define *practice* in terms of a list of what *not* to do *with* what to *whom*, as if sex were analogous to plumbing;
- we debate homosexual and heterosexual *lifestyles*, probing which is more consonant with scripture.

In all of this, we act as if sexuality were the defining piece of our identity. Is this the way Christians should be talking about sex? I hope not. I want to return to that first language of faith and reframe the issues so that they reflect our deepest and richest insights about the human person.

[4] For a Christian,

- our primary *identity* is being a Christian - nothing more and nothing less;
- our primary *orientation* is to the Body of Christ;

- our primary *practice* is the practice of baptism - by which I mean not simply the rite of Christian initiation, but what Luther called the daily return to baptism that Christians make along the journey of discipleship;
- and our primary *lifestyle* is the lifestyle of discipleship.¹

Let me state the reasons for this reframing.

[5] First, the way we talk about sexuality does not reflect our deepest commitments. I want Christian talk about sexuality to begin at the font, rather than in the bedroom. In beginning with the rite of initiation we all share, we have a shot at a single sexual ethic that speaks to our children, our teenagers, our singles, our partnered and married couples, our widows and widowers, and those among us who have received what Luther called the "rare gift of celibacy."

[6] At this point, we are poised to say too much about Gay/Lesbian relationships, too little (as usual) about the heterosexual relationships we already bless in ceremonies of holy matrimony, and nothing more helpful to anyone else than "Just Say No."

[7] Second, beginning with baptism invites us to think about sexual ethics as more than a containment policy, a grim list of "thou-shalt-nots." If we shift the discussion to that first language of faith, we frame a sexual ethics that speaks more constructively:

- about positive values (i.e., fidelity, service, generativity) that ought to mark relationships the church blesses,
- about virtues that characterize Christian discipleship in relationship,
- about the character of relationships envisioned, not simply the gender of the two people involved, and
- finally, about promises that anchor people in the rough seas of change.

2. Jesus - or Serious Consideration of Second Article Concerns

[8] Lutherans tend to draw on First Article concerns when speaking about sexuality. Decalogical language surfaces naturally, especially the "thou shalt nots." When the rubber hits the road, we abandon the best insights of our incarnational commitments and revert to orders of creation language. At best, sexual ethics becomes a matter of diplomacy. It's a calculated policy of containment: keeping concupiscence at bay. At worst, sexual ethics becomes a matter of plumbing, as we sort male and female parts to decide which goes where. Why should plumbing and politics fund our metaphors for sexuality when we have such rich fare in the organic metaphors of baptism into the body of Christ?

[9] This argument moves sexual ethics from the realm of creation into the body of Christ, from First Article to Second Article concerns. In this, I plead guilty to H. Richard Niebuhr's charge that Lutherans practice a "monotheism of the Second Person."

[10] Conversation with the Lutheran Ethicists' Gathering in Dallas, 2007 coalesced around a trinitarian sexual ethic, for we are created in the image of the Trinitarian God, *imago*

trinitatis. There was a great deal of enthusiasm around this proposal, but fewer concrete proposals. Here's how one might proceed to combine First, Second, and Third Article concerns into a Christian sexual ethic:

1. First Article concerns deal with God's relational creation, its dynamic "orders," and how "The Fall" ruptured God's intended relationships among humans, between humans and the earth, among the animals, between humans and animals (Genesis 3). All Lutheran talk of natural law and orders of creation could be treated here, along with the purpose and function of human sexuality in general.
2. Second Article concerns could be developed along the lines presented here: baptism as that rite of initiation into the Body of Christ, as well as baptism as a practice of discipleship to which Christians daily return.
3. Third Article concerns treat the presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, which "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" all Christians. The Holy Spirit is the circulatory system in the Body of Christ, infusing all people and all relationship with Christ's life-giving breath. Laurie Jungling works with qualities of relationship that are "life-giving" in her contribution to this issue, "Called to Serve Life."

3. Anything about Bodies....:

[11] Christian talk about sexuality is strangely disembodied - maybe the Gnostics won after all. Yet, if we remain true to our christological commitments, Lutherans must talk about bodies. Wanda Deifelt's signal contribution to the Dallas gathering, "For God is also the God of bodies" identifies and explores Luther's commitment to embodiment, as well as teasing out the implications for Lutheran sexual ethics.

[12] When sexuality is shaped by baptism, Christ's is the body that matters most.² Baptism incorporates us into the body of Christ, making us members of that one body. When Christians think about sexuality, Christ's is the body they ought to think about first. The question is: what shall we think? Christian talk about sexuality ought to reference Christ's body in two ways.

[13] First, the sacraments and Christ's body:

[14] Christian identity is decisively shaped by baptism. Baptism both names and claims us. The rite names us "child of God," incorporating us into a new family. Too often we reduce the ceremony to mere christening. In fact, the real name given is "child of God," and that God-given name eclipses all blood borne identities. The apostle Paul states how identity claims us: "You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (1 Corinthians 3:23). Christian identity is a matter of belonging: *who* we are depends decisively on *whose* we are.

[15] Baptism and the Lord's Supper further claim Christians. In focusing on the theological significance of these sacraments, we forget their physical force. Baptism takes us up into the body of Christ. Grafted onto that body, we spend the rest of our lives living into a new

reality.³ In the Lord's Supper we take the body and blood of Christ into our own bodies. The gurus of righteous eating claim that "you are what you eat." If they are right, then this transforms us, hard-wiring us for life, not just in any body, but in the body of Christ. Taken together, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper feature a mutual interpenetration between the believer and Christ of the sort one finds in only one other area, that of sexuality. The similarity did not escape Brother Martin.⁴

[16] Second, justification and Christ's body:

[17] Luther's writing on justification references Christ's body in a way crucial for Christian talk about sexuality. His great Reformation treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian," develops the doctrine of justification in two ways. The first is the familiar forensic context, where we are declared righteous by Christ. The setting is the courtroom; the metaphors juridical; the change in status instantaneous; and the biblical warrant hails from Paul's great christological hymn, Philippians 2:5-11.

[18] But there is a second context for justification in the treatise, and here Paul's letter to Ephesians rules (5:31-32). The setting is the bedroom; the metaphors frankly sexual, and the change more gradual. Through union with Christ, we become who we are: "children of God." Faith unites the soul to Christ, as "a bride is united with her bridegroom." Luther continues:

"By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage - indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage - it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil."⁵

The forensic context for justification overshadows its erotic context, but this gradual work of the Christian's growth into this union with Christ invites some fresh thinking on our own erotic unions. Let me suggest two ways this might play out.

[19] First, the "happy exchange" between two people affects a community. Just as a sprained ankle throws the entire body out of alignment, so our sexuality impacts a community. It can build up a community or eat away at its fabric like a ravenous moth. Ceremonies of marriage and blessing indicate this in the intricate web of promises made between two people, but also between the couple and the community, between the couple and God, between the community and God. As acts of performative speech, these promises create a safety net beneath the couple. Should they fall, when they have children, when one or the other dies, that safety net is there.

[20] In addition, every human relationship has irreconcilable differences, and the people involved depend upon the expectations of a community to hold them together. These expectations can be onerous and even coercive, and we hear of couples staying together simply to conform to the expectations of others. However, I suspect that, more often than not, our friends and family love us into being the couple we can be.

[21] Second, in the passage quoted above, Luther offers the marriage between Christ and the believer as "the most perfect of all marriages," an "example" for human unions. What would marriage preparation look like if this counsel were taken more seriously?⁶ If the union between Christ and the believer is to be a model for human marriage, that suggests more attention to the kind and quality of relationship. And this points to another thing missing in Lutheran talk about sex.

4. Attention to the Kind and Quality of Relationship:

[22] Whether it's defined in forensic or erotic terms, justification is a relational concept. It speaks to "right relationship" - better, righting a relationship - between God and humans. A tradition that stakes its theological claim on justification ought to be concerned about relationship, particularly the kind and quality of relationship appropriate to a people dwelling in Christ's righteousness.

[23] Most of us have a "primary relationship," which anchors all others.⁷ For some this may be with a spouse or significant other; for others it could be a passionate relationship with work or vocation, with a hobby or sport. That primary relationship gives all other relationships both limit and depth.⁸ On one hand, it limits all other relationships, dictating boundaries they must observe in order to safeguard the primary relationship. On the other, it patterns these other relationships, setting a kind of "gold standard" for these other relationships, but also infusing them with the goods of the primary relationship.

[24] Discipleship is not chiefly about assenting to a creed or signing onto a confession, but about being in relationship with Christ. That primary relationship patterns all others. If we take Luther at his word, how does this "perfect marriage" pattern our other unions?

[25] I would suggest that there are various values and virtues that ought to be manifest in Christian relationships, particularly Christian sexual relationship. The Dallas gathering prompted me to be clearer about the difference between values and virtues. Simply put, *values* identify what we aim for in our relationships, while *virtues* describe the kind of people we ought to become in order to get there. *Values* attach to goals toward which we aim; *virtues* describe the kind of people we need to become in order to instantiate those values.

[26] Elaborating this could be a whole paper in itself. That future discussion would need to treat *norms*, as the prescriptive and proscriptive guidelines (the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" of sexual conduct) that we need in order to "true" our relationships. Such a discussion would also need to identify *practices*, as the habitual and embodied skills faithful and loving relationship require for the long haul. Finally, that discussion would also need to treat the tools of practical decision-making that Kate Ott so clearly identifies in her paper:

What are you trying to decide?

Who is involved?

What are the **consequences**?

What are the **feelings** that attend various consequences?

What are your own **standards** for decision-making?

What or who **influences** you in making this decision (e.g., peer pressure, parental influence, etc.)?

Who finally decides?

[27] It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage that larger discussion. Let me identify three *values* (fidelity, generativity, and service) that all sexual relationships ought to aim for.

[28] Three *values* characterize our relationship with Christ, and these ought to leak into our human unions: fidelity, generativity, and service.

[29] **Fidelity** first: Looking over the life of Jesus, one is impressed with his faithfulness both to the feckless disciples and to his loving -- but at times also distant -- Father. When Peter rebukes him for not being the Rambo from the Desert the oppressed Jews were expecting, Jesus tells him "Get behind me" (Mark 8:33). A less faithful master might have ordered him to "Get lost!" Indeed, when the resurrected Jesus returns to cook the disciples breakfast (the First Breakfast, which follows the Last Supper), he offers Peter a chance to revoke each of his denials. Then he repeats twice the first words he ever said to Peter: "Follow me" (John 21:19, 22).

[30] This story between Jesus and Peter doesn't make it into many marriage prep sessions - but maybe it should. This kind of faithfulness goes beyond a mere 50-50 egalitarian split to detail a kind of full-body fidelity that gives a couple the confidence to hunker down for the long haul. Fidelity provides the stability humans crave in order to flourish.

[31] Promise-making ensures fidelity, and every ceremony of commitment, whether it be marriage, baptism, or a rite of blessing, features promise-making. As creatures we flourish in relative stability. Circumstances may be beyond our control, but we do have some control over who we are in the midst of them. Promises made and kept ensure that we will be the same people tomorrow that we pledged to be today.

[32] Because humans display a complex integrity of body, mind, soul, and spirit, what we do with our bodies sends shock waves throughout the human person. Sexual practices that neglect this - promiscuity, infidelity, narcissism, casual sex - involve more facets of the human person than the body. They kill the spirit and wound the heart. As Kate Ott powerfully documents in her contribution to the Dallas gathering, a teenager feels "dirtied" by a chance sexual encounter. What she cannot know at the time is how lasting that stain will be. Nor does she suspect that too many chance encounters will make her feel damaged for the rest of her life, not only in the eyes of others but in her own. Intimacy, an elusive but essential good, flourishes in an arena of trust and fidelity. Promise-making and promise-keeping cultivate the soil for true intimacy.

[33] As Garrison Keillor put it, "We all depend on each other more than we know." Two people cannot make enough promises to support the fidelity they crave. They depend upon a community that surrounds them, making promises of its own to the couple, but also holding them in loving accountability to their pledges. Concretely, this means Christians should pay attention to the promises of fidelity made in a marriage or blessing ceremony. Two people promise before a

community and before God. Their promises create a community of accountability. The couple publicly declares its support to a community; the community declares its support to the couple. Every marriage ceremony makes these promises implicitly, even if not every marriage lives them out. The promises of mutual accountability need to be explicit - and they need to be lived out.

[34] **Service** reflects the interdependence of Christian community, as each member serves its function. But service cuts two ways. A couple functions together more effectively than the two people involved function individually. They "neighbor" the world, bringing to it the gifts of their union, as well as their individual gifts. In addition, each member of the couple "serves" the other. Kierkegaard spoke of treating the spouse or partner as a "neighbor" - and certainly those closest to us bear the face of "stranger" or at times even "enemy."⁹ In using the term neighbor, Kierkegaard reminds us that we bear the face of Christ to those who know us best and that our nearest and dearest also bear the face of Christ to us.

[35] **Generativity** signals a couple's commitment to the future. It captures the gracious invitation to "pay it forward," since we can never repay God back for all the mercies we have received. Most think of generativity in terms of procreation and consider they have done their part in propagating the next generation. Yet many "Married with Children" couples get stuck in a kind of group narcissism, where their needs eclipse the needs of others. The drive toward *my* future, or even *our* future obscures a commitment to *God's* future.

[36] Seen through the lens of baptism, generativity has a broader scope. Baptism obligates both community and couple to uphold and support, nurture and admonish members of that body. Generativity signals willingness to deliver on that promise.

[37] There was a great deal of interest in generativity at the Dallas gathering, and we clearly need more work on what it means and how it differs from procreativity. These brief paragraphs only begin the conversation. Gary Simpson's oral contribution to the gathering, "A Revisionist Perspective by means of a Traditional Approach," and the larger work upon which it was based both promise to develop this notion more fully. We eagerly await his upcoming book on sexual ethics.

[38] The church has a stake in supporting any relationship that commits to these values of fidelity, generativity, and service. Unfortunately, a lot of marriages do not; a lot of committed relationships do. Clearly, Christians need a rich, thick description of sexual ethics congruent with our best insights into discipleship. That raises another thing I miss when Lutherans talk about sex.

5. The Virtues that Discipleship Enables:

[39] We're good at the "thou shalt nots" when it comes to sexual ethics, less voluble when pressed for the "thou shalt" or positive norms that ought to govern sexual behavior, and almost mute when asked to elaborate the habits of heart that make for "excellent sex."¹⁰

[40] When it leads from creation in the image of the Trinity, *imago trinitatis*, not solely from First Article concerns, Christian sexual ethics asks different questions: Does being pregnant with the love of Christ make a difference? What difference does it make?¹¹ How does living in the Spirit of the Risen Christ make for excellent sex?

[41] If belonging shapes identity, if *whose* we are informs *who* we are, then the grace of Christ unbends hearts turned in on themselves (*cor incurvatus in se*) toward Christ and the neighbor. Over time and in community, the uncoiled heart develops certain stable dispositions, all of which bear crucially on relationships with Christ and the neighbor who shares our bed.

[42] Of the cardinal virtues *justice* is most often drafted to frame a sexual ethics; of the theological virtues *love* gets trotted out again and again.¹² Lisa Fullam has suggested that there might be a whole realm of subsidiarity virtues that derive from these that would bear directly on Christian sexual practice: kindness, self-care, creativity, playfulness, security, et al.¹³

[43] Lutherans could add their own, deriving these not from an Aristotelian or Thomistic background of what comprises human excellence (*arete*), but from discipleship.

[44] Finally, joy ought to mark Christian disciples, particularly in their sexual relationships. Joy shapes relationships patterned on the union between Christ and the believer. After all, justification ought to free Christians from any kind of performance anxiety. If this is truly the "happy exchange" that Luther envisioned, our whole being should be charged with joy.¹⁴ Deeper than happiness, joy is that settled disposition marked with love's confidence. We can't generate the love that joy feeds on; rather, it functions as the respiratory system in the body of Christ. Again, Paul puts it best: "...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). That's love worth spreading around.

[45] The values of fidelity, generativity, and service aim people toward life in the body of Christ. They also engender settled habits of the heart: justice, kindness, self-care, creativity, playfulness, security, and above all, joy. Developed over time and in relationship, these capacities deepen relationship with God and the self, with our significant others and with a community.

[46] Finding ourselves in the terrain of virtue ethics frightens a tradition dedicated as much to fighting works-righteousness as following Jesus.¹⁵ It's worth remembering that these settled habits emerge not from human effort but from the Christ who indwells believer and community. Indeed, I would distinguish Lutheran and Roman Catholic approaches to virtue ethics in terms of starting point. Traditionally, Roman Catholic appropriations begin with natural law, the leaning in every creature toward its Creator. The approach I outline here begins with Christ. Sexual ethics looks different depending on where you begin: First Article concerns or Second Articles concerns. Again, I would welcome fuller treatment of a trinitarian sexual ethics that would incorporate the dynamic and providential work of the Spirit.

[47] I suspect that the rich moral psychology virtue ethics offers could give us the thick description of discipleship we desire.¹⁶ Because virtue ethics treats the moral as ordinary, it ensures that those "random acts of kindness" are not so random, but deeply patterned on our relationship with Christ and deeply woven into the fabric of a lasting relationship. Because virtue ethics is personal, it adapts to the unique personhood of the individual disciple. We get different purchase on what faithfulness or prudence looks like at varying stages of the life cycle. As novelist and occasional philosopher Iris Murdoch astutely observed that courage looks different when you're twenty-years-old than when you are fifty.¹⁷ Finally, because virtue ethics is communal, we are obliged to think of the impact of our behavior on the body we live in.

Conclusion:

[48] Lutherans do it dialectically. On one hand, we are anxious not to appear as prudish as our abstinence-backing fundamentalist sisters and brothers. Nor do we wish to endorse the vaunted (and possibly overrated) Augustinian legacy of aversion to sex. So we regard sex as a "gift," and then quickly stipulate who gets to open the gift and under what circumstances. The most positive counsel we give is something like "celibacy in singleness, fidelity in marriage." All of which may be right, but isn't really helpful. It doesn't give you much to go on in the backseat of a car. The approach I offer here attempts to say more.

[49] Finally, there wasn't room on the list to say much about two additional things I miss when Lutherans talk about sex: humor and charity. A sense of humor would lighten our discussions, allowing us to harbor our seriousness for the other great issues that merit attention: war, hunger, poverty, racism, and genocide. Charity in our conversations might help others identify us, as in "You will know we are Christians by our love." It would surely be more in keeping with the topic than the hardened hearts and reddened faces I've encountered walking up and down in the church sexuality forums. I offer these preliminary remarks in the spirit of both.¹⁸

Endnotes

[1.](#) For fuller argument of this point, see my "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in James M. Childs Jr., *Faithful Conversations: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 59-79.

[2.](#) I appreciate the wisdom of Paul Lehmann on this point: "It will occasion no surprise that a Christian look at sexual meaning should sooner or later take a look at Jesus Christ.... What, then, does the presence of Jesus Christ, in the experience of the Christian, offer to the experience and practice of human sexuality? The answer is this: the transfiguration of that experience through the transfiguration of the participants in it, as they participate in it. Thus sexual experience and behavior, as basic to humanity, become integral to discipleship." Paul Lehmann, *The Decalogue and a Human Future* (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 221.

[3.](#) Baptism is both an initiation rite, a one-time event, and a practice, a touchstone to which Christians daily return. This second dimension of baptism, baptism as a practice, ought to orient Christian sexuality. Cf. Luther's explanation in his "Small Catechism,"

What does such baptizing with water signify?

Answer: It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence. ("Small Catechism: Baptism," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. and transl. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 349.

[4.](#) Nor was he the first. "Union with Christ" was portrayed sexually throughout Christian history by both men and women lay and religious alike. Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux gave this bridal mysticism its most eloquent expression in his sermons on the "Song of Songs," a text which captured the medieval imagination. Cf. "Sermons on the Song of Songs," *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Writings (Classics of Western Spirituality)* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 207-278.

[5.](#) Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 603.

[6.](#) More interesting, what would happen if we read the same gender literalism into Ephesians 5:32 ("This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church."), that we read in Genesis 1:27 ("male and female he created them")? Paul speaks of union between Christ and the church, a union Luther shifts to address the union between Christ the bridegroom and the individual believer. If all of the "brides" of Christ have to be female to protect a "heterosexual structure of God's creation," half of humanity has no hope.

[7.](#) That primary relationship could be with spouse or significant other; it could also be a passionate involvement in a career or hobby. For example, I am certain that adventurer Steve Irwin's primary relationship was with exotic animals.

[8.](#) Does baptism incorporate us into the body of Christ, meaning that unbaptized Christians live outside the body? Or does baptism acknowledge the fact of our belonging to the body of Christ, meaning that all are "anonymous members," to borrow from Karl Rahner's notion of "anonymous Christians?" See also Grace Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), as a development of this latter point. This is a crucial question. My argument would raise questions about unions between Christians and non-Christians or atheists. It would, interestingly, not raise questions about blessing unions between G/L Christians. I don't think these are insurmountable issues, but I do want to flag them.

[9.](#) Cf. Kierkegaard, Soren, *Works of Love*, trans. D.F. Swensen and L.M. Swensen (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946).

10. I adopt the phrase from Roman Catholic moral theologian Lisa Fullam and her "Excellent Sex" (Unpublished ms., 2006). <mailto:lfullam@jstb.edu>

11. The question never gets posed in precisely this way, because most sexual ethics is written by men. But get a female philosopher or theologian in the ring, and the subjects of natality and motherhood surface naturally: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958; Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking* (New York: Ballantine, 1989).

12. See the fine constructive work done by Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006) and Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

13. Lisa Fullam, "Excellent Sex" (Unpublished ms., 2006).

14. In another piece, I identified fidelity, service, and generativity as criteria for relationships that the church ought to bless. After listening to so many joyless conversations about Christian sexuality, I was moved to add the fourth criteria. Cf. "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversation*, ed. James M. Childs Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 76-77.

15. See my short piece on a Lutheran approach to virtue ethics in the on-line *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* of December, 2006: <http://www.elca.org/jle/archive/06-12.asp> along with the fine articles by Lisa Dahill and Lisa Fullam.

16. See Lisa Fullam's excellent article on virtue ethics in the December, 2006 edition of the on-line *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*. She argues that a virtue perspective offers an ethics that is ordinary, personal, communal, and communicable.

17. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 1970).

18. I was grateful for the chance to present a thumbnail sketch of these ideas before the Task Force on Sexuality in 2003. The list is longer, but the spirit is the same. I attach it here:

Unsolicited advice from a practicing Christian....

1. Get categories of primary identity straight -- oops! -- accurate: e.g., being a Christian ought to be leaky -- after all, the waters of baptism get everything wet. Identity, orientation, behavior, and practice are all watered by baptism. Begin from what we all hold in common: the primary identity as "child of God."

2. Move beyond sexual ethics as a "containment policy": e.g., a matter of who does what with what to whom.

3. Beware the "hermeneutics of narcissism," as in "what does the Bible say about ME ME ME...;" mine the bible for the "ethics of God," what God is doing to, for, and in spite of us.
4. Don't be afraid to think about bodies -- but think about Christ's body first....how it penetrates us (the eating and drink of the Lord's Supper): how we are taken up into it (the incorporation of Baptism).
5. Explore the erotic dimensions of Christian practices, especially baptism and the Lord's Supper. Think about these, if not as sexual practices, as practices that orient Christian sexuality.
6. Don't call sexuality a "gift," as if it were the only part of human nature that were all justus and not also peccator.
7. Befriend norms -- everyone is afraid of talking about sexual behavior normatively. But don't be afraid to be normative about sexuality -- just have the norms apply equally to everyone.
8. Derive norms unabashedly from discipleship -- this after all, is the only "lifestyle" that counts.
9. Explore positive norms of discipleship that ought to inform all relationships the church blesses, e.g., fidelity (sexual, emotional, spiritual), generosity, service, and generativity.
10. Remember that Christians believe in "sex in public" (Stanley Hauerwas), and sexual behavior, like all Christian behavior, is a matter of ecclesial concern. Don't be afraid of that -- and don't apologize for that either. Therefore, mind you "P's and Q's" -- at least the "P's":
 - a. Publicity: Any union between two people, regardless of their gender-orientation/sex-class, etc. is full of irreconcilable differences -- communities hold people together. Don't bless anything you can't deliver the community of support/blessing/admonition for.
 - b. Promise: Any union between two people, regardless of their gender/orientation.. is full of irreconcilable differences -- promises hold people together: between two people, couple and God, couple and community.

© *February 2007*
Journal of Lutheran Ethics (JLE)
Volume 7, Issue 2