

Responses to the Proposed Social Statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, and the *Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies*

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An Assessment of the Statement on Human Sexuality & Recommendations on Ministry Policy

*by Herbert Chilstrom,
Former ELCA Presiding Bishop*

The ELCA Assembly in Minneapolis in August will have two important proposals to consider regarding human sexuality. **I endorse both of them.** Like many others in our church, I've spent a good deal of time reviewing these documents. I'm impressed with the work of the Task Force. After some 20 years of wrestling with this complex and potentially divisive issue, I believe they have given us a Statement and a set of Recommendations the broad membership of our church can accept.

The proposed Statement – Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust – affirms the kinds of things many of us have supported for years. Among them:

- It witnesses to the goodness of human sexuality as a gift from God.
- It looks to Scripture and the traditions of the Lutheran church for guidance in this important area of our lives, recognizing that each new generation must determine how to apply those principles.
- It lifts up trust, faithfulness and commitment as foundations for healthy relationships.
- It underscores the importance of the lifelong and legal aspects of heterosexual marriage.
- It is honest about the complexities of human sexuality as well as its negative aspects and our sinful use of this gift from God.
- It recognizes the need to affirm our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers as well as same-gender oriented persons in their quest for lifelong relationships.
- It urges caution when developing physical intimacy, reminding partners that it must be matched with growing affection and commitment.

One of the key ideas in the proposed Statement is the phrase “conscience-bound belief.” We are urged to respect the “conscience-bound belief” of those who disagree with us.

This concept, of course, is not new. In fact, we live with it all the time. To take but one example: My closest friend and I disagree on the legitimacy of the death penalty. One of us has a “conscience-bound belief” that the heinous murder of an innocent child justifies the death penalty. The other, also relying on a “conscience-bound belief,” thinks it is always wrong to ask the state to take a life on behalf of all of us. Each of us has come to our conclusions on the basis of our commitment to the Bible, tradition and, as Luther expressed it, “plain reason.” Though we disagree on this specific social issue, our respect for each other keeps us in close friendship. We agree to disagree on this subject.

This kind of freedom to differ is especially critical, of course, in relation to the status of homosexual persons in our church. It is not likely that we will come to consensus on this issue in the near future. But can we disagree in this area without breaking faith and unity with each other? Yes, I believe we can.

The proposed statement suggests that not only are we to respect the “conscience-bound belief” of individuals; we are also called on to respect the “conscience-bound belief” of congregations and synods.

We all recognize, of course, that as individuals and as a church we sometimes change our minds about “conscience-bound” stances. Churches that once excluded minority persons now openly welcome them. Congregations that once refused to call women as pastors now accept and affirm them. Only a few years ago only persons who had been confirmed could receive the Lord's Supper. Now younger children are encouraged to participate.

It seems clear that in the more than 20 years since the ELCA first tried to adopt a statement on human sexuality many have also changed their minds regarding the place of homosexual persons in church and society. Change was not easy. Long tradition, rooted in our understanding of the Bible, meant that we clung tightly to our convictions. But as we became acquainted with gay and lesbian persons and read literature about the nature of sexual orientation many came to a new understanding of the issues. We changed our minds.

That leads to the second proposal the forthcoming Churchwide Assembly will consider: Recommendations on Ministry Policies. I believe the task force has put before the church a way to respect our varied positions. (. . .)

At the risk of oversimplification, this is what the Recommendations call for.

Step 1 – Do we agree that homosexual persons are not sinful in some unusual way?

Step 2 – If so, may we agree to discuss their role in the life of our church?

Step 3 – If so, may we agree to respect our differences as we discuss this matter?

Step 4 – If so, may we agree that in our church some congregations and synods may call gay and lesbian persons in same-gender relationships to the ministries of this church, without expecting others to do the same?

[The Task Force has suggested that] each step must be approved before the Assembly can go on to the next.

I wish everyone in our church were at the place where we could simply say, “It is time to include responsible brothers and sisters in Christ in same-gender relationships among the rostered ministries of this church.” That is, for me and many others, our “conscience-bound belief.”

But I am a realist. Though we have taken some significant steps in the last 20 years, our church is not at the place where we can do more than what is proposed in the Recommendations. If they are adopted by the Churchwide Assembly they will open the door for us to be more honest. We are a diverse church, held together by our common belief that we are made right with God by grace alone and the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. Within that confession, we learn to live together in unity with our differences.

We can no longer go on with the status quo, with one bishop trying to press the literal implications of our current policies and another looking the other way.

These Recommendations finally give at least some of our bishops, synods and congregations the integrity they long for in openly welcoming our talented and deeply committed sisters and brothers into our family of shepherds and servants of the Gospel.

I pray we will move ahead and approve the Statement and Recommendations with grace and love.

Online Source:

See the full text at www.goodsoil.org/responses

Response from Faculty at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

(. . .)

As a confessional church, the Lutheran community affirms the normative authority of Scripture and tradition. Lutherans also insist that Christ and the gospel are the hermeneutical key for interpreting both Scripture and tradition. The gospel, which always points us to Christ, is, therefore, the interpretative lens in light of which the biblical and theological heritage of the church must be understood, evaluated and affirmed. One of the realities that becomes apparent when we see Christ is that he consistently crossed religious and societal boundaries, reached out to the marginalized and modeled a radical ethic of love. We trust that Christ and his gospel now inspire God’s people to live in ways that are more consistent with the good news and with the example of Christ. Hence, they are free to be divine instruments of grace in the world because of Christ’s redemptive acts. They have been precisely that at particular moments throughout history when the Holy Spirit, by means of the gospel, has inspired faithful individuals and communities to see the Scriptures in a new light and to implement changes that have resulted in crucial theological, ecclesiastical and social reforms.

Luther’s challenge of the medieval church’s distinction between the spiritual and temporal estates and his affirmation of the universal priesthood of the baptized, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, the flowering of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, opposition to racism and apartheid, and support for the ordination of women are striking examples of theological, ecclesiastical and social changes inspired by the transformative power of the gospel.

In our time, Christ and his message of grace empower the community of faith to understand specific scriptural passages differently than in the past, to change tradition-

al ecclesiastical policies and practices, and to affirm sisters and brothers who share a common baptismal identity, who confess the same faith in Christ and whose call to ministry is an expression of the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives. In recent times, the church has repented of interpretations of scripture that justified slavery, silenced women, oppressed people of color, and maligned the Jewish people. The crucial question before the church is not whether the current recommendation on ministry policies challenges long-standing scriptural interpretations and ecclesiastical practices. It obviously does. Rather, the ultimate question is whether the recommendation on ministry policies proclaims Christ [*Christum treiben*] and his message of grace more faithfully than older interpretations and practices. We, the faculty of LSTC, are convinced that it does and, therefore, support the approval of the recommendation.

(. . .)

As a Lutheran community, part of the body of Christ, we also share with you our experience of Christ's refreshing spirit in our seminary community. Here at LSTC, we have been blessed by lively and faithful conversations with lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender students and pastors in our midst about matters of sexuality, gender identity, and committed relationships to human partners and God. We see firsthand the hope, the pain, and the joy in these conversations. While we do not always agree with each other, we discover Christ's spirit in this fellowship. Deeply committed to our unity in Christ, we once were emboldened to ordain free and former slaves, whites together with peoples of color, women and men alike, to serve as pastors of the church. We must now broaden that circle to include a yet more full company of God's children who confess the gospel and the lordship of Christ Jesus.

The undersigned members of the LSTC faculty:

Klaus-Peter Adam,	Terrence Baeder
Kathleen D. Billman	Kurt Hendel
Esther Menn	Raymond Pickett
José D. Rodriguez	Craig Satterlee
Lea Schweitz	Michael Shelley
Benjamin Stewart	Rosanne Swanson
Linda E. Thomas	Barbara Rossing
David Rhoads	Peter Vethanayagamony
Christine Wenderoth	Vítor Westhelle

The above statement was written and endorsed by members of the faculty at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and is not an official statement of the school.

See the full text at www.goodsoil.org/responses

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Bishop Peter Rogness (St. Paul Area Synod) Endorses Proposed Social Statement and Recommendation on Ministry Policies

An excerpt from Bishop Rogness' May 29, 2009 report to the St. Paul Area Synod assembly:

The key to being church together is not eliminating all tension; the key is in being grounded in the center of the faith and trusting that God is greater than our own questions and differences. The diversity enriches us if we are clear about what it is that grounds us, binds us together, gives us life. This is not your church or mine, this is the church of the God we have come to know in Jesus Christ, the church that is given life not by the rightness of all our decisions, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit. I believe the recommendations of the task force are a faithful response to that movement of the Spirit, and will serve this church well.

My hope is that for the new life that beckons, we take this step. I hope we say, with the apostles facing hard decisions in Acts 15, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." And I hope that if that happens, those of you for whom this is not a desired step would look to the counsel of Gamaliel in that same Book of Acts, who cautioned those who would stomp out this new sect of Christ-followers: "Let it be—if it is of God we ought not fight it, and if it is not, it will fall." It is not an unfaithful thing to let God's time unfold.

See the full text at www.goodsoil.org/responses

Originally published at: www.spas-elca.org/about/assembly/ReportAssembly2009.pdf

An Open Letter from Lutheran Seminarians to the Bishops of the ELCA

We come to you as Lutheran seminarians pursuing a variety of callings and ministries, studying in both Lutheran and non-Lutheran seminaries. (. . .)

We applaud the ELCA's commitment to the dialogue on sexuality and its affirmation of sexuality as a gift and trust from God. After careful consideration of the issue at hand and its influence on the life of the church, we

stand in solidarity affirming the [Task Force’s] recommendation for structured flexibility within the rostering requirements of the ELCA. Acknowledging the potential limitations of structured flexibility, we nonetheless seek here to establish our steadfast support for the rostering of “members who are in publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gendered relationships.”

The life of the church depends upon the full recognition and inclusion of ministerial gifts engendered by the Spirit. (. . .)

Signatories: 256 ELCA seminarians.

See the online source for the full list of 256 signatories:

Online Source:

See the full text at www.goodsoil.org/responses

Originally published at:

<http://elcaminarianresponse.weebly.com>

Appropriate Next Steps for the ELCA

We, the undersigned ELCA teaching theologians, and Christian theologians teaching at ELCA institutions, wish to affirm and support the four recommendations on Ministry Policies proposed by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis (Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies available at: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/JTF-Human-Sexuality/Report-and-Recommendation.aspx>).

We take this action on the basis of the rationale on lines 147–212 of the Task Force’s document, and we would specifically highlight the following points:

- We too affirm the authority of the Scriptures, but the seven biblical texts that are frequently cited on the issue of homosexuality are not directly pertinent to the 21st century discussion because some of them condemn specifically homosexual rape, deal with questions of “clean and unclean” that are not normative in the Christian community, do not take into account issues like “sexual orientation,” and presuppose that all would agree with a particular interpretation of what “nature” teaches.
- The Task Force wisely proposes that both heterosexual and homosexual persons are expected to express sexual intimacy within publicly accountable, lifelong, and mo-

nogamous relationships. This has long been the expectation for heterosexual couples, and therefore is an appropriate expectation for homosexual couples as well.

- The first recommendation of the Task Force rightly proposes that acceptance of same-gender relationships among all people of this church is a prerequisite to considering people in same-gender relationships for rostered leadership positions.
- While not all Lutheran church bodies are of one mind on these issues, Scandinavian and German Lutherans have already taken similar actions to those being proposed now in the ELCA.
- We who favor the changes being proposed pledge ourselves to honor and respect those sisters and brothers within the ELCA who for reasons of theology and conscience choose to oppose these changes.
- We recognize that the unity of the church is based on one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, and that within this unity, faithful members may disagree on individual items of faith and life. (. . .)

Online Source:

See the full text at www.goodsoil.org/responses

Originally published at:

<http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc11/kleinrossingrevised.htm>

The following ELCA teaching theologians and Christian theologians teaching at ELCA institutions support this statement:

1. James W. Aageson, Concordia College, Moorhead
2. Klaus-Peter Adam, Lutheran Sch. of Theology at Chicago
3. Terrence Baeder, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
4. James L. Bailey, Emeritus Wartburg Theological Seminary
5. David Balch, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
6. Mark Bangert, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
7. John Barbour, St. Olaf College
8. Mark W. Bartusch, Valparaiso University
9. Norman A. Beck, Texas Lutheran University
10. Patricia Beckman, St. Olaf College
11. Kadi Billman, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
12. Karla Bohmbach, Susquehanna University
13. Walter C. Bouzard, Jr., Wartburg College
14. James L. Boyce, Luther Seminary *emeritus*
15. James M. Brandt, St. Paul School of Theology
16. Julius Carroll, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
17. Corrine L. Carvalho, University of St. Thomas
18. Herbert W. Chilstrom, Presiding Bishop *emeritus*, ELCA
19. Samuel Cruz, Union Theological Seminary
20. Lisa Dahill, Trinity Lutheran Seminary
21. Steed V. Davidson, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
22. Mary Sue Dreier, Luther Seminary
23. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., Harvard Divinity School

24. Paul W. Egertson, Bishop *emeritus* Southwest Calif. Synod
25. John H. Elliott, University of San Francisco
26. Lowell Erdahl, Bishop *emeritus* St. Paul Area Synod
27. Maria Erling, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
28. R. Guy Erwin, California Lutheran University
29. Norma Cook Everist, Wartburg Theological Seminary
30. Joseph Everson, California Lutheran University
31. Stephen P. Folkemer, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
32. David Fredrickson, Luther Seminary
33. Clifford Green, *emeritus* Hartford Seminary
34. Robert D. Haak, Augustana College, Rock Island
35. Loren Halvorson, Luther Seminary *emeritus*
36. Roy Hammerling, Concordia College, Moorhead
37. Guillermo Hansen, Luther Seminary
38. Shauna Hannon, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
39. James Hanson, St. Olaf College
40. Paul D. Hanson, Harvard Divinity School
41. Laura M. Hartman, Augustan College, Rock Island
42. Philip Hefner, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
43. Kurt Hendel, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
44. Sarah Henrich, Luther Seminary
45. Stewart W. Herman, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN
46. Mary Hess, Luther Seminary
47. John Hoffmeyer, Lutheran Theological Sem. at Philadelphia
48. Krista E. Hughes, Hanover College
49. Arland Hultgren, Luther Seminary
50. Paul O. Ingram, Pacific Lutheran University *emeritus*
51. Robert L. Isaksen, bishop of the New England Synod, 1988-2000.
52. Carol R. Jacobson, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
53. Paul Jersild, Luth. Theological Southern Seminary *emeritus*
54. Roger Johnson, *emeritus* Wellesley Colleg
55. Brian C. Jones, Wartburg College
56. Peder Jothen, St. Olaf College
57. Laurie Jungling, Augustana College, Sioux Falls
58. Everett R. Kalin, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
59. James Kelhoffer, St. Louis University
60. Peter Kjeseth, Wartburg Theological Seminary *emeritus*
61. Ralph W. Klein, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
62. Kathryn A. Kleinhans, Wartburg College
63. Edgar Krentz, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
64. Karl Krueger, Lutheran Theological Sem. at Philadelphia
65. L. DeAne Lagerquist, St. Olaf College
66. Carol Schersten LaHurd, Luth.School of Theology at Chicago
67. Paul Landahl, Bishop *emeritus* Metro Chicago Synod
68. Dirk G. Lange, Luther Seminary
69. Kristin Johnston Largen, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
70. Gordon Lathrop, Yale Divinity School
71. Carolyn S. Leeb, Valparaiso University
72. William E. Leshner, Luth. School of Theology at Chicago
73. Richard A. Lischer, Duke Divinity School
74. Lynne F. Lorenzen, Augsburg College
75. Mary Lowe, Augsburg College
76. David J. Lull, Wartburg Theological Seminary
77. Barbara Lundblad, Union Theological Seminary
78. Ronald B. MacLennan, Bethany College
79. Romwald Maczka, Carthage College
80. Bruce Malchow, Sacred Heart School of Theology, WI
81. Madeleine Forell Marshall, California Lutheran University
82. Jim Martin-Schramm, Luther College
83. Susan McArver, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
84. Ian A. McFarland, Candler School of Theology, Emory University
85. Esther Menn, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
86. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Seattle University
87. Gladys G. Moore, Mount Holyoke College
88. C. Lynn Nakamura, Trinity Lutheran Seminary
89. Peter T. Nash, Wartburg College
90. Craig Nesson, Wartburg Theological Seminary
91. Frederick Niedner, Valparaiso University
92. Douglas E. Oakman, Pacific Lutheran University
93. Emlyn Ott, Trinity Lutheran Seminary
94. Jon Pahl, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
95. Gary Pence, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
96. Ann Milliken Pederson, Augustana College, Sioux Falls
97. Pete Pero, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
98. Richard J. Perry, Jr., Luth. School of Theology at Chicago
99. Brian Peterson, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
100. Cheryl Peterson, Trinity Lutheran Seminary
101. Ray Pickett, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
102. Melinda A. Quivik, Lutheran Theo. Sem. at Philadelphia
103. Mark William Radecke, Susquehanna University
104. Larry Rasmussen, Union Theological Seminary (emeritus)
105. David Ratke, Lenoir-Rhyne University
106. H. Frederick Reisz, Jr., President Emeritus, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
107. Caryn D. Riswold, Illinois College
108. David Rhoads, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
109. Nelson Rivera, Luth. Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
110. José David Rodriguez, Lutheran Sch.of Theology at Chicago
111. Tom Rogers, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
112. Barbara Rossing, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
113. Philip L. Ruge-Jones, Texas Lutheran University
114. H. Paul Santmire, emeritus Wellesley College
115. Craig Satterlee, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
116. Gwen Saylor, Wartburg Theological Seminary
117. Christian Scharen, Luther Seminary
118. Thomas Schattauer, Wartburg Theological Seminary
119. Brooks Schramm, Luth.Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
120. Lea Schweitz, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
121. Michael Shelley, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
122. Gary Simpson, Luther Seminary
123. Mary M. Solberg, Gustavus Adolphus College
124. Gary Stansell, St. Olaf College
125. Ben Stewart, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
126. Kirsi Stjerna, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
127. Martha Stortz, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
128. Jarvis Streeter, California Lutheran University
129. Fred Strickert, Wartburg College
130. Jane E. Strohl, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
131. Paul Stuehrenberg, Yale Divinity School
132. Karla Suomala, Luther College
133. Mark N. Swanson, Luth. School of Theology at Chicago
134. Richard W. Swanson, Augustana College, Sioux Falls
135. Rosanne A. Swanson, Lutheran Sch.of Theology at Chicago
136. Ronald F. Thiemann, Harvard Divinity School
137. James Thomas, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
138. Linda E. Thomas, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
139. Samuel Thomas, California Lutheran University
140. Mark Thomsen, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
141. Samuel Torvend, Pacific Lutheran University
142. Teresa Swan Tuite, Bates College
143. Alicia Vargas, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
144. Peter Vethanayagamony, Luth. Sch. of Theology at Chicago
145. Aana Marie Vigen, Loyola University Chicago
146. Gregory Walter, St. Olaf Collage
147. Christine Wenderoth, Luth. School of Theology at Chicago
148. Audrey West, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
149. Paul Westermeyer, Luther Seminary
150. Vitor Westhelle, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
151. Courtney Wilder, Midland Lutheran College
152. Ritva H. Williams, Augustana College, Rock Island
153. Charles A. Wilson, St. Olaf College