

In Support of the Social Statement

S-1. The Social Statement on Human Sexuality, with its emphasis on the important place of family in life of Christians and society, its emphasis on Gospel and its understanding of the diversity of God's creation **is the document to guide the church in its interaction with the society** it is in mission to, and surrounded by, and in its interaction equitably with the full range of the members of the church, including LGBT people.

S-2. The social statement supports our family values. I agree with the proposed social statement's values regarding the importance of taking strong stances on anti-violence, anti-persecution, and anti-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. I wish the document could find its way to more clearly support same-gender couples and their families, and not allow for the suggestion that a second-class status is ever acceptable, anywhere, for any family. Still, in order for our church find a concrete way to live together faithfully, even amidst our disagreements, I urge the churchwide assembly to pass the proposed Social Statement.

S-3. As the statement says, "The critical issue with respect to the family is not whether it has a conventional form, but how it performs indispensable individual and social tasks." This is exactly what the church should be saying to the culture. "All families have responsibility for the tasks of providing safety, shielding intimacy, and developing trustworthy relationships." [lines 736-738] When a family does those things, the church should support it, regardless of whether it's a family with just one parent, or a grandparent, or two adults of the same gender.

S-4. The social statement outlines a great model for "family values." The church should be about the business of preserving the resources needed for the survival and flourishing of family life by celebrating relationships and fostering the communal structure in which these relationships are lived out. This is what "family values" are all about. The first response of the church toward all families should be one of welcome and support. The proposed statement would help guide us in doing that.

S-5. The social statement calls us to support whatever creates and sustains strong families. I fully support this approach because it supports the family values that I grew up with. In the social statement, the discussion of marriage places particular emphasis on the promises of fidelity and on public accountability. These provide the ground and source of the family, which the statement identifies as an "indispensable social institution" [line 701]. It calls on congregations to welcome and support all families, regardless of whether it's a family with just one parent, or a couple who adopts, or a family that forms when a parent remarries after the death of a spouse, or two adults of the same gender

S-6. The social statement supports our Christian values. The principal values expressed in the proposed social statement affirm relationships, families, and the purpose of families in society. Love, trust, education, protection, spiritual growth, the responsibility that accrues because of the gift of sexuality, and nurturing of relational partners and their children all are important aspects of living life as committed Christians. Although the statement falters in that it doesn't state clearly and unequivocally that these values hold whether you are a LGBT person or not, we should nevertheless urge the churchwide assembly to adopt the statement. It's time for our church to affirm these Christian values. We have one God, but we are made in God's image in many different ways, and our right relationships reflect that diversity.

S-7. One of the distinct emphases in Lutheran theology is it that frees us to love each other and binds us in service to each other. Therefore, the statement rightly affirms the values of serving the neighbor, trust and commitment, family, and public accountability in relationship. It emphasizes how these values combine in a social ethic that seeks to build the common good and the reign of God. It describes how it's the work of the church to preserve the resources needed for the survival and flourishing of family life by celebrating relationships and fostering the communal structure in which these relationships are lived out. I wish the statement had found a way to state explicitly that these values apply equally to, and should be celebrated equally with, all couples and families, regardless of form. Still, in order for our church find a concrete way to live together faithfully, even amidst our disagreements, I urge the churchwide assembly to pass the proposed Social Statement. It is a reasonable step forward.

S-8. God made marriage for people, not people for marriage. (*see Mark 2:27*)

I believe in the core values regarding committed relationships and family expressed in the proposed statement. I wish the statement would not have expressed these values so often in terms of "man and woman" and "husband and wife." These seem like exclusive categories, since they fail to recognize the rich complexity of God's creation. It has been amply demonstrated that same-gender couples and their families can and do live out those values each and every day, doing so to the glory of God, to the good of society, and to their own benefit—just as much so as heterosexual couples and their families. God made marriage for people, not people for marriage. I believe that any relationship that has all the characteristics of a right relationship as denoted in the statement is blessed by God—is made in the image of God—and is worthy of the church's attention and blessing as well. Still, in order for our church find a concrete way to live together faithfully, even amidst our disagreements, I urge the churchwide assembly to pass the proposed Social Statement.

S-9. It seems fitting for the social statement to refer to marriage as a tradition that is tied to history, as it does in line 502, where it refers to the “historic Christian tradition” of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman. It’s fitting because we know there is not just one model for marriage and the family recorded in Scripture. Rather, the Bible records several models. Many of these models would not be considered acceptable if practiced today. For example, we find “Levirate” marriage, where, if a married man dies childless, his widow is to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she produced a male heir. Jesus mentions this custom without criticism (Mark 12:18-27 par.). None of us today obey this unambiguous commandment of Scripture. Why is this law ignored? We need a social statement that reflects the Bible we actually read in our churches, and that’s why I support the proposed document before us.

S-10. Some in the church want us to believe that there is only one biblical model for marriage: a loving, mutual union between one man and one woman. But we see in Deuteronomy 21: 15-17 where Scripture presumes a man can have two wives. Exodus 21:7-11 describes how a man may purchase a slave as a wife for himself or for his son. In Deuteronomy 21:10-14, we see laws governing the situation where, (quote) “When you go forth to war against your enemies and the Lord your God gives them into your hands and you take them captive, and see among the captives a beautiful woman and you have desire for her and would take her for yourself as wife” What both Scripture and history show is that marital forms change to meet the concrete realities of a culture at a given time.

S-11. Our current church policy on same-gender marriage sets pastors against the distinct trend we are now seeing enacted in the laws of our states. As of recent months, six states have moved to recognize same-gender marriage (Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut). How strange it has been for ELCA Lutherans in these states to seek the blessing of their pastor, only to be told that church policy bans their pastor from performing the marriage. How strange it has been for our church to be at odds with laws of the state which seek to hold couples publicly accountable to their vows of love, commitment, and trust, vows which form the basis of stable family life.

S-12. Jesus’ words in Mark 10 are often taken out of context as an argument against same-gender marriage. But the text makes clear that Jesus is responding to a question about divorce, not about the gender definition of marriage. We can’t make Jesus prove something he wasn’t even speaking about. Jesus’ point is that the two become one flesh, and so therefore they cannot be separated by a mere certificate of divorce. Indeed, Jesus clearly teaches that “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.” Jesus teaches that divorce is a bad thing, and yet our church allows the ordained clergy to “practice” it. Why then the ban on loving, committed same-gender relationships?

Many say, "But the church doesn't bless divorce. It never calls divorce a good thing." Yes, that's true. But we need to look at the whole text in that passage from Mark. It's not simply divorce that Jesus equates with adultery--it's divorce AND remarriage. "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her" The church does not bless divorce, but it does bless second (and third) marriages. For the ELCA to continue to ban pastors from performing same-gender marriages where they are legal seems to set up LGBT people as scapegoats for problems with heterosexual marriage.

Let's decide now to stop banning our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters from married life in those states that recognize it and begin living together faithfully amidst our disagreements. Those who are against same-gender marriage won't have to perform them, attend them, or enter into them if they don't want to.

S-13. The creation story in Genesis 2 is often taken out of context as an argument against same-gender marriage. It's sometimes argued that Genesis shows that, before Woman is created, Adam is somehow incomplete. It's said he needs his "complementary other." But that reading is completely alien to the text. The problem in Genesis is clearly stated: Adam is lonely. The solution, then, has nothing to do with completing Adam with Woman. After removing Adam's rib, God closes up the hole. God heals the hole in Adam even before woman is created. *No one else but God completes us.*

Nevertheless, God tells us it is not good for anyone to be lonely. And so the point of the story is that Woman is another human being, flesh of Adam's flesh, bone of his bones, and not like one of the other animals. In creating Adam as one for whom it is not good to be alone, God creates him as one whose heart needs to be gladdened by another, one who needs to delight in another, and he puts himself at the service of that need, seeking again and again one who will indeed make glad his heart. If anything can be said to "work against God's creation," it is the ban on same-gender couples from marrying.

S-14. The Synods have spoken. Thirty-eight of the ELCA's 65 synods, meeting in their assemblies, have asked the churchwide assembly to pass the Social Statement. That's 79% of the synods that considered the question, with only five synods passing memorials against the social statement. The call for change has been sounded from every region of the church: from *all* the synods in regions 2 and 7; from *all* the synods except one in region 1; from urban synods such as Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington DC and non-urban synods such as Eastern Washington-Idaho, Montana, Central States, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, Indiana-Kentucky, Florida-Bahamas. It is clear that our church is ready to allow for differences of opinion on this topic to co-exist without banning each other from the full life of the church.

S-15. In a world where 3 nations in Africa and 4 elsewhere put people to death for being in a same-gender relationship, or simply being gay or lesbian, passing both the Social Statement and the change to ministry policy lights a bright beacon for all to see about the meaning of lives lived following Christ and the Gospel.

S-16. Our church has changed. To try to move backward will only cause more violation, more dissent within our body. We cannot live in denial of this but rather we must acknowledge that our body is changing – it includes people of all opinions- and therefore we must move forward together, acknowledging the gifts of the Spirit offered to those of like-mind and those with whom we disagree adamantly. We can move forward together confident of the work and the call of the Spirit in our own church body, adopting policies that acknowledge and celebrate all of our callings and gifts.

Additional Talking Points

These talking points can be used if and when these topics arise.

Re: Unity

Unity-1

While issues of sexuality are uncomfortable for some, they are nevertheless not foundational to what or who we are as a church or to where our common communion is recognized. As we read in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confessions, **what establishes the true unity of the church is that “the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.”** It’s about Word and Sacrament, not about our views on sexuality.

Are we to say that somehow the true unity of the church comes, as a necessary condition, from uniformity in our understanding of what the law says and what it requires in every instance? Must we subscribe to particular understandings of laws in order to confess a common faith in the Gospel?

Our unity is in Jesus’ name. Because of him, we trust that the church can allow for different views about sexuality. In God’s house there are many rooms.

Unity-2

Some are concerned about the unity of the church, as if disagreements about family and relationships are hurtful to our unity. But the author of Ephesians and Jesus himself tell us that we are not the ones who create unity. Remember Luther’s explanation of the third article of the Creed: **it is the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole church on earth and keeps it in union with Christ.** Unity should not be confused with uniformity – things do not need to be same everywhere and everyplace, and not everyone must agree with all things. **Our unity is in Christ, not in our agreement about sexuality.**

Unity-3

Lutherans disagree on many significant issues. Lutherans in the pews every Sunday have differing and strongly held opinions on abortion, capital punishment, the ordination of women, wine or grape juice in the service, war, apostolic succession, and differing interpretations of Scripture. Allowing congregations to affirm both laypersons and ministers who are in committed, lifelong, same-gender relationships will not be required of anyone, nor will it be prevented for those who do wish it. This is very Lutheran.

(talking points continue)

Unity-4 (Re: Lutheran World Federation)

In the ELCA's current debate, **it's instructive to note the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**. The Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has appointed a Task Force on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality. The LWF task force has issued a document called "Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue," which the council has commended to all of the partner churches for study and discussion. That document concludes:

The churches are asked to consider what, in the issues at stake, is contrary to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the doctrine of justification by grace alone, the article on which the Church stands or falls (Article 4 of the Lutheran Confessions). Considering this, we conclude that the issues we have been appointed to discuss and make recommendations regarding, need not threaten to divide the Lutheran communion, even though there are disagreements about these issues. Other churches may have different theological approaches to such issues. However, these differences do not mean that the Bible, or the issues in question, are not taken seriously. They should be recognized as serious for the churches as well as for the people who are involved in these issues with their lives and their faith, and who are asking if there is a place for them in the church that proclaims justification by grace alone.

Re: so-called "reparative therapy"

(Don't introduce this topic unless the other side does so first)

We should not let the distortions of junk science distract from our support of all families.

Many of us have heard stories from those who say they have left their "homosexual lifestyles" behind and have become heterosexual. In many cases, such folks have sought treatment through specialized therapies often referred to as "reparative therapy" or "conversion" therapy. For the most part, these therapies present gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual relationships as not only a departure from God's will, but also as a form of mental or developmental illness.

However, earlier this month, the American Psychological Association (APA) once again voted overwhelmingly on a resolution "advising parents, guardians, young people and their families [to] avoid sexual orientation treatments that portray homosexuality as a mental illness or developmental disorder and instead seek psychotherapy, social support and educational services that provide accurate information on sexual orientation and sexuality, increase family and school support and reduce rejection of sexual minority youth."

The APA went on to say, "Contrary to claims of sexual orientation change advocates and practitioners, there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation." They also voted overwhelmingly "that same-sex sexual and romantic attractions, feelings, and behaviors are normal and positive variations of human sexuality." That APA "opposes the distortion and selective use of scientific data about homosexuality by individuals and organizations seeking to influence public policy and public opinion and will take a leadership role in responding to such distortions."

Similarly, the ELCA should not let such distortions affect its support of all couples and families, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. Instead, the ELCA should collaborate with the APA in its work to take leadership roles against such harmful distortion.