

YOUR PEOPLE – *shall be* – MY PEOPLE

Stories, Questions, and Resources for
Conversations About Marriage for All Loving,
Committed Couples



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MarriageConversations**

Your People Shall Be My People

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Table of Contents

Introduction - 4

Models for Conversation - 6

Personal Stories - 10

Further Questions for Discussion - 30

Frequently Asked Questions about - 31
Marriage and ELCA Policy

Resources - 35

Study

Pastoral Care

Wedding Liturgies

Reconciling in Christ

Introduction

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

Ruth 1: 16-17

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

In order to provide for continuing conversations about how to minister to and with same-gender couples and their families, ReconcilingWorks presents *Your People Shall Be My People*. The title of this booklet comes from the Book of Ruth, invoking Ruth's vow to forever cling to Naomi and celebrating her strong love and commitment to those whom she called family. It's designed for use in small groups, congregations, or synod workshops.

Your People Shall Be My People opens with several models for conversation and some helpful practices to shape discussion. You will meet six Lutherans from a variety of backgrounds, each with a story to share about how support for marriage for same-gender couples matters. We invite you to receive their witness and consider

the questions following each story. We pray they enrich your discussion.

Following these stories you can find a collection of answers to common questions about marriage in the ELCA, a list of resources for study, pastoral care, wedding liturgies, and widening the church's welcome.

As you use this resource, we invite you to join us and others across the church in this prayer:

**God of all times and places,
whose will it is that we be in relationship with others,
bless family life and fill our homes
with your peace and joy.**

**Be with us now as we gather to find ways to
minister to and with all people and families.**

**Enable us to work together to secure a more
nurturing and welcoming society, so all may find
protection, community, love, dignity, and celebration.**

**Give us understanding, wisdom, and
compassion to guide our discussions.**

**All this is done through Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Models for Conversation

There are many ways in which you and others in your congregation or synod can curate conversations about marriage for same-gender couples (and their families). In all of these models, we suggest the following practices shape your conversation:

Open and close with prayer, grounding your time together in the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Listen deeply and avoid debate, remembering the word “conversation” implies openness to “conversion” and change. Encourage centered speaking (e.g. “I think,” “I feel”) rather than accusatory speech (e.g. “You think that...”) Ask clarifying questions and seek understanding. Be cautious about speaking in broad sweeping generalities (e.g. “Gay people...”) to avoid untrue stereotypes.

Practice self-care and courageous learning. Because the topics of marriage and family involve some of the most vulnerable, personal parts of our lives, encourage others to be mindful of their feelings and assure participants they can reveal as much about their personal lives as they choose. At the same time, invite participants to share from the heart, honoring the courage that LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people demonstrate in choosing to live publicly.

Include the voices of LGBTQ people in all discussions and events. The stories in this booklet are a beginning point. If you are having a panel discussion, ensure LGBTQ people are represented among the speakers.

In Your Congregation...

Hold an Adult Education/Sunday School series, selecting one or two stories for each session, or one or more of the resources included in this booklet. After reading a piece aloud, invite participants to share what resonated with them or what challenged them. Choose one or all of the questions for reflection that follow each story. For questions that reference scripture, have Bibles on hand for participants to use.

Invite people to a World Café dialogue. Gather people in groups of four around tables. At the beginning of the first round, invite a participant to read a story for the whole group. Then, for twenty minutes, each table reflects on the story and questions that follow. Organizers often cover the tables in butcher or craft paper and provide crayons and pens for participants to record thoughts, questions, and images that connect to the topic at hand. At the end of twenty minutes, participants find a new table, hear a new story, and engage in a new conversation. After at least three rounds, there is a time for participants to share with the whole group. Go [ere for more information about this model: **www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method**](http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method)

Host a panel discussion, inviting speakers from a variety of contexts (teachers, pastors, community organizers, single folks, married/partnered couples, etc.) to speak about what marriage means to them. You might ask them some of the questions for reflection following each story, or ask them to speak after a reading aloud a story or watching a brief film. Such events could be hosted by your congregation, by a synod committee, a seminary, or by the synod at an annual assembly.

Arrange a showing of a film with time for discussion. See the resources listed in this booklet for suggested movie titles.

Continue the conversation by sharing the resources you find in this book with your pastor and others in your congregation, with other churches in your neighborhood or synod, and with your bishop.

In Your Synod...

Any of the models used in congregations can be adapted for use in synod-wide gatherings. In addition to these, consider the following:

“The Nitty-Gritty on Marriage”

Synod-wide Workshop (3 hours). Designed for congregations in the Metro Chicago Synod (ELCA), this 3-hour workshop is an opportunity to talk about providing the ministry of marriage to same-gender couples. Consider the following to get you started.

- **Marriage and the ELCA:** Give an overview about the ELCA’s policies and teachings on marriage and human sexuality (found on pages 31–34). Your synod bishop may have issued a pastoral letter with guidance for congregations that could be shared and discussed. Other examples of pastoral letters and statements can be found at www.reconcilingworks.org/support-lutheran-leaders
- **Introduce this booklet, *Your People Shall Be My People*,** as a resource for conversations, pointing out the personal stories and discussion questions found from pages 10–29. Workshop participants might be invited to sample a few questions or share how conversations have developed in their congregations.
- **Liturgical Considerations:** The ELCA’s Executive for Worship, through the Office of the Presiding Bishop, is currently developing liturgical resources appropriate for same-gender couples to use within the marriage service of Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW). It’s anticipated that these resources will be available online later in 2016. Pastors may use other liturgies. Give an overview of the resources found on pages 40–41 and invite pastors who have crafted wedding liturgies appropriate for all loving, committed couples to share their work.
- **Prepare for invitations** to attend or preside at a wedding for a same-gender couple. Pastor Michael Fick’s pieces, “Going

to the Chapel” and “Pastoral Considerations for LGBTQ Couples” (see page 38), are helpful resources.

- **Legislative Considerations:** Invite a representative from a local or state-wide LGBTQ-advocacy organization to share important information about laws in your city or state, either existing or proposed, that intend to allow businesses, municipalities, or institutions to discriminate against LGBTQ people based on asserted religious views about marriage for same-gender couples. (These laws are often misleadingly referred to as versions of the “Religious Freedom Restoration Act.”) Discuss how these laws may affect LGBTQ people and their families. For a list of LGBTQ rights organizations in the U.S., see www.EqualityFederation.org/members/list
- **What’s next?** Conversations about providing a ministry of marriage to same-gender couples often lead people to wonder how else they might minister to LGBTQ people. Make sure they are aware of the Reconciling in Christ program and the Building an Inclusive Church trainings, which are administered by ReconcilingWorks. More information about these resources can be found on pages 42–43.

Conversations and Resources on Marriage:

Synod Assembly Workshop (45 minutes). This outline for a 45-minute workshop is appropriate for a synod assembly.

- Begin by assessing when and where occasions for conversations on marriage may come up.
- Go over different models for holding formal conversations and touch on practices that are helpful for productive and positive conversation (pages 6–7).
- Make sure to engage people in considering what being asked to attend or officiate at a wedding for a same-gender couple means (see Pastor Fick’s piece “Going to the Chapel” on page 38) and address liturgical concerns (see above and pages 40–41).
- ReconcilingWorks has experienced volunteer leaders throughout the country; we may be able to provide workshop facilitators in your area. Contact us!

Personal Stories

Here are six personal stories from Lutherans of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Some have stood up as straight allies (advocates for LGBTQ welcome). Others identify as part of the diverse LGBTQ community. All have experiences in the church and in society that shape why marriage for all loving committed couples matters and informs what family means to them. We invite you to receive their witness as they share their experiences in the church and in society.





The Rev. Patt Kauffman is former pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Port Jervis, New York. She is pictured officiating at the marriage of Katie Bryant (left) and Emily Margolis. Photo credit: William E. Kauffman, Jr.

**I understand
God to be good
and gracious—
in giving Jesus,
and in Jesus'
message of radical
inclusion for all
who seek God.**

The Rev. Patt Kauffman

The calls come in—the callers a little hesitant, sometimes beating around the bush, not getting quickly to why they have called. When they finally ask whether we really solemnize same-gender weddings in our church, we answer enthusiastically, “Yes, we do! Congratulations!”

At our staff meetings, when we put a wedding on the calendar and speak a bit about the couple, we are always saddened by the fear that often accompanies those who call seeking what we at St. Peter's in Port Jervis, New York, understand to be a sacred right to

marry the person you love. We all remain humbled and honored, because we realize how much work the church still has to do to welcome, embrace, seek forgiveness from, and, in short, make a place for all God's children.

When couples come in for premarital counseling and we start to study the Bible, and they look at the scriptures speaking of welcome and inclusion, love, and joy, many weep with the realization that God desires no one be left out. There is space for all in God's love for humankind.

And when the words of the marriage rite are spoken, when they hear themselves called "dearly beloved" and are prayed over with words that for so long didn't include them, with vows they never expected to be a part of their reality, there are few dry eyes in the sanctuary!

I understand God to be good and gracious—in giving Jesus, and in Jesus' message of radical inclusion for all who seek God. I see this as the central understanding of my call as pastor: to speak of this amazing, gracious love and to teach God's people how to live in the reality of this love.

I am blessed to serve at St. Peter's, a community that understands its calling to be one of welcome. When I accepted the call, I was asked to help the church grow in its understanding of welcoming the stranger. We started with Bible study, exploring how God spoke to our forebears and still speaks to us now. And when it was time to become a Reconciling in Christ* congregation, there was no need for a vote; by overwhelming consensus, it was understood that this is how we wanted the church to be in a hurting and painful world.

In response to the decision, three families left, but we have grown by over forty families, and continue to grow. New faces are a weekly occurrence. This community understands God's amazing grace isn't just for some, but for all.

Weddings are announced in our newsletters and weekly updates and worship folder inserts, prayers are offered for the couples, and our youth sign on to serve as acolytes and crucifers. And all of us thank God for grace—the ability to see ourselves in everyone God calls us to serve, and a willingness to make this world better for Christ’s sake. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

*** Note: “Reconciling in Christ (RIC)” is a program of ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation recognizing congregations who publicly welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the Lutheran church.**

See www.reconcilingworks.org/RIC for more information.

Questions for discussion

Pastor Kauffman describes many of the couples she sees in premarital counseling as being deeply moved by “the realization that God desires no one be left out, there is space for all in God’s love for humankind.” **When was a time you felt moved by an experience of God’s love?**

Many verses in scripture speak about God’s grace and love (e.g. John 3:16-17, Psalm 86:12-13). **What are some of your favorite verses that speak about God’s love? How do they shape your (or your congregation’s) central understanding of your ministry to single adults, partnered or married people, or couples seeking to be married?**

Pastor Kauffman ends her story with thanks to God for giving her congregation the “ability to see ourselves in everyone God calls us to serve.” **How might this kind of seeing shape the ways that your congregation ministers to same-gender couples and their families?**



Lauren (left) 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. They are pictured here with their son, Luke.

For the first months of our darling Luke's life, I had no legal right to protect him.

Lauren Morse-Wendt

When my wife Michelle and I held our wedding at the church I serve as Mission and Ministry Developer, Edina Community Lutheran Church, in 2010, 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 congregation that we love, our wedding day seemed like the pinnacle of our relationship: our vow before God and community for our life together.

Over the years I have learned how love can grow, much as a family grows. In 2011, while expecting our first child, we spent our weekends researching the safest car seat, plugging electrical sockets, choosing the most secure crib, and focusing on dozens of other ways to protect our child as he entered the world.

Yet, as we prepared for his birth, we knew we couldn't fully protect him because, at the time, the state of Minnesota denied same-gender couples legal marriage. Because of those state laws, for the first months of our darling Luke's life, I had no legal right to protect him and I endured an expensive court process to adopt our son and ensure he would be recognized as my child.

In many places for those first months, I was treated as a legal outsider: at the hospital my wife signed all papers; the birth certificate made no mention of me; and at the doctor's office, only Michelle could represent him. I was not recognized as Luke's mother in so many parts of our life together...but Sunday morning was different. Our congregation threw us two baby showers, doted over our sweet newborn after worship, and welcomed him in song at his baptism. In church, we were and are just like every other family—because, truthfully, that is what we have always been. Just like any other family.

Michelle and I are grateful to be a part of a congregation that loves not just our family, but all families—enough to spend hundreds of hours in 2012 working to defeat a constitutional amendment banning same-gender marriage in Minnesota. Then, in May 2013, our congregation cheered with others across the state as Minnesota's governor signed marriage equality into law. Michelle, Luke, and I gathered with others from Edina Community Lutheran at the Capitol building that day, celebrating that the state finally caught up to our congregation in recognizing that our family is just like any other.

On August 15, 2013, our family quietly gathered in our church sanctuary to renew our vows and state to our government what our congregation had been saying all along: we are a family.

These days, our weekends are filled with zoo trips, finger painting, negotiating naptime and, of course, worship with our congregation. We are grateful to raise Luke in a church that has always affirmed not only his place in the family of Christ, but also his place in the Morse-Wendt family.

Questions for discussion

Lauren describes how, in the months after her son Luke's birth, she was "treated as a legal outsider." **When was a time when you felt like you ought to belong, but someone or a group of people treated you like an outsider? What emotions do you associate with people being treated differently?**

The Bible contains many stories of parents striving to seek their children's wellbeing (e.g. Matthew 15:21-28, 2 Kings 4:1-7). Loving families provide a healthy environment for children to thrive. **How have you experienced a loving family provide for their children?**

Lauren ends her story with gratitude that her congregation has "always affirmed not only [Luke's] place in the family of Christ, but also his place in the Morse-Wendt family." **What is your congregation's role in supporting children and their families, particularly children with LGBTQ parents?**



The Rev. Tim Feiertag is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Everett, Washington

This is a great opportunity to explore the concept of “family” beyond two parents raising children.

The Rev. Tim Feiertag

“But don’t you want a family of your own some day?” Talk to any single and/or childless adult of any sexual orientation or gender identity and chances are good that they’ve been asked this question. I have most often heard those words in its tone of incredulity after expressing my satisfaction with my husbandless life. As we engage in conversations as a church about how to support same sex couples, this is also a great opportunity to discuss what it means to be part of a family, to explore the concept of

“family” beyond two parents raising children, so that all people find the support they need.

After I accepted my identity as a gay man in 1993 and began entering into gay male communities, one of the things I grew to cherish was how we who were shut out of the formal societal structure of family were able to form families of our own—big, fluid, complicated families of couples, singles, friends, roommates, exes, bar mates, bowling teammates, and coworkers. These family units supplemented or took the place of biological family who all too often were not prepared to accept our lives as out gay men. Our families were far bigger than any one household.

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:44-47). I wonder if that’s what it was like for the early Christian church. Were the biological families of the first followers of Jesus unprepared to accept their lives as Followers of The Way? Did the early church understand that family had to be far bigger than any one household?

Let us continue to work for marriage equality and acceptance for same-sex couples everywhere. But if that only creates more nuclear families turned in on themselves, unwilling or unable to share what they have, unable to be part of an extended network of family to others, what a shallow victory that will be.

Questions for discussion

Have you ever had a friendship or relationship that has felt or become like “family” in your life? What made that relationship important?

Pastor Feiertag quotes a passage from the Book of Acts describing a scene of great inclusion and hospitality. **What do you think was the understanding of the early church about “family”?**

The four short chapters of the Book of Ruth depict with clarity and tenderness the plight of widowed women in the Ancient Near East. Diane Jacobson, professor emerita of Old Testament at Luther Seminary (Saint Paul, Minnesota), writes “The book of Ruth daringly redefines the biblical understanding of family, centering not on clan and blood relationships but on acts of loyalty and love.” **What meaning does family have for Ruth and Naomi? What meaning does it have for us today? How can the church help us expand our understanding of family?**

How can the church support single people, be they straight or LGBTQ?



Our love has
not been diminished
by my gender
transition—it's the
same love we've always
had for one another.

JamieAnn (left) and her
wife, Peggy, hiking in
Edinburgh, Scotland.

JamieAnn
Meyers

My wife Peggy and I met as seventh-graders in 1957 and began “going steady” as boy and girl the summer before our senior year in high school. In 1966, we were married in a traditional ceremony my Dad conducted as pastor of our LCA congregation in Columbia, PA. We promised each other “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.”

Since that day our life together has been filled with joy and happiness. We are parents and grandparents to two wonderful adult children and three grandchildren. Like most couples however, our marriage has also been beset with times of sorrow

and doubt. In hindsight, we can now attribute many of these difficulties to my lifelong struggle with gender identity. I buried this struggle so deep inside that for years I couldn't even come out to myself, let alone to anyone else. I was paralyzed by the fear of losing everything if I were to open the closet door. When I finally came out to my wife in 2004 as a transgender woman, we both feared our marriage would end on the rocks of gender transition, and we counted our time together in days instead of years.

When I finally transitioned physically and socially to my true gender identity, I became whole in body and spirit for the first time in my life. Becoming my true self enabled Peggy and me as individuals and as a couple to discover new strength and new understanding in our relationship. We've found new ways of expressing our love as a same-gender-loving couple. Our relationship has changed in so many ways, yet hasn't changed at all.

We have been in a federally legal marriage for nearly 50 years. Our marriage is about deepening our love and commitment, finding new ways to share and give ourselves to each other. Our life together is about growing and changing in relationship to one another and our family. Our marriage is about love and acceptance of another for who we are, not for who society expects us to be.

Our love has not been diminished by my gender transition—it's the same love we've always had for one another. We have not given up in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, and our family has grown in support, understanding and love.

Our commitment to one another is the same commitment our God of Love and Justice has made to each and every one of us: to love us rather than hate us; to care for us rather than abandon us; to free us from oppression rather than to oppress us. Those who suggest our marriage should be less valued than marriages of heterosexual couples, or say our marriage should not even be valid, devalue the true meaning of marriage for everyone.

Our marriage doesn't redefine marriage. It doesn't threaten or change anyone else's marriage. Our marriage is about love and faithfulness irrespective of gender, and it reaffirms the ongoing, nearly lifelong love and commitment between the two of us that strengthens our family and society.

It's our prayer that all loving couples all over the world might one day be able to unite in marriage that publicly seals their loving commitment to one another "till death us do part."

Questions for discussion

Think about a major change or transition that has happened in your life. **How did it challenge your spouse, friends, or children? What held true about your spouse, friends, or children?**

How are JamieAnn and Peggy living out the values of love, commitment, and understanding in the midst of their life changes? Have you experienced similar values in relationships you have?

In one of scripture's most memorable stories, Queen Esther reveals her Jewish heritage to the King at the risk of losing her life in order to save the lives of her uncle Mordecai and her extended Jewish family (Esther 8:1-8). **How can you and your congregation support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and families as they commit to the importance of family?**



The Rev. David Eck (center) is pastor of Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Fairview, North Carolina. He is pictured with his two children, Michael Dawn Martoccio (left) and Jason Kindel (right), and with his husband, Gary Mitchell, who is the Associate Pastor of 1st Congregational UCC in Asheville, North Carolina.

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.

Rev. David Eck

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. If we make wise choices, this new family can become a tremendous blessing in our lives.

I am fortunate to have an amazing “new” family. My husband, Gary, and I have been together for twenty-three years. We fostered two children, one of whom made us grandparents in 2012. I also have an amazing group of friends who have supported my “new” family in good times and in bad.

Like anyone else, I would do anything to protect my family. Unfortunately, for many years, I was not able to give them all the protections necessary to guarantee their safety and security. You see, Gary and I live in the state of North Carolina, which, until recently (October 2014), did not recognize our marriage. Even though we were legally married in Seattle, and even though the Defense of Marriage Act had, by that point, been struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, North Carolina still did not allow for joint adoption of children. I was not recognized as my daughter’s “real” parent. So when she was injured a few years back, all the money in the world would not have helped us from being denied important medical information. 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.

The good news is that we were finally able to jointly adopt both our children in July 2015. We were the first gay couple in our county to do so. Needless to say, it was a wonderful day in the life of our family.

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. We are thankful for the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June 2015, which requires the marriages of LGBTQ couples in every state be recognized. But even with the freedom to marry, there are still no employment protections in over half of the states. In far too many places, you can be fired from your job simply for being gay, making it difficult for many families to take care of each other.

Marriage equality matters because it matters to my family. As we walk this leg of the journey with each other—weathering the continuing inequalities in many places and hopeful for change in the church—we need to make sure all loving, committed couples and their families have safe communities in which to worship and thrive. Our love and care for each other call for nothing less.

Of course, we know that changing state and federal laws to better serve all couples and families is only a starting point. There is still a great need for healing and reconciliation, for re-weaving the protective strands of community and lovingkindness in our churches and community. How can our congregations, synods, and churchwide office be instruments of such reconciliation?

Questions for discussion

What does your family need in order to be safe and secure? Are these needs similar or different from those of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people and their families?

How can the three expressions of the ELCA—local congregations, synods, and the Churchwide offices—help ensure families like David’s have a safe community in which to worship and thrive?

What is needed in order for each expression to be able to support all families?



The Rev. Donna Simon (right) is pastor of St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Missouri. She is pictured here with her wife, Colleen.

We couldn't be married in our church, so we brought the church with us.

Rev. Donna Simon

Colleen and I were married in 2012, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, at a lovely ELCA church which was quite welcoming to us, the first same-gender couple to be married there. We couldn't be married in our church, so we brought the church with us. Members of our beloved community made the journey to Iowa, prayed with us, sang with us, and witnessed our commitment to one another. On the wedding day, we heard these words of Jesus, from John's gospel: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." We chose the lesson from John 15 because it spoke to us of our love for one another, but also because it spoke of the love we

enjoy within the community at St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church.

We would rather have been married in our own congregation, the church I serve and the church to which we have both been dedicated for some years now. Alas, we were not hopeful the opportunity to be married legally in Missouri would be forthcoming in the near future.

Being married under God's grace and the promises we made far outweigh any legal rights. While we waited for the state of Missouri, and the rest of the United States, to recognize our marriage, we enjoyed the support of our extended families, trusting that neither of us would ever be barred from the other's hospital room.

Other couples have not always been so fortunate. For many LGBTQ couples, the protections afforded by marriage (now, thankfully, recognized by the entire country) provide essential protections. For years, partners were barred entry to hospital rooms, because only a biological family member was considered next-of-kin. Others were denied pension and social security benefits after years of loving relationship, because their state did not recognize their relationship.

We love our church—both the congregation and this denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our church has been on a journey of discovery, walking together toward the promise of loving one another as God has loved us. I am proud to have been associated with each part of the Lutheran welcoming movement: Lutherans Concerned, now ReconcilingWorks*; a member of the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, now Proclaim**; and a pastor in the ELCA, serving fourteen years, recognized on the roster for four.

It has been a great journey, and it continues. As we talk together about loving one another as God has loved us, we will be called into larger conversations on marriage, adoption, and immigration.

We will go there faithfully, filled with God's reconciling love and Martin Luther's undying hope for the church. Let the people of the ELCA say "Amen."

Questions for discussion

Pastor Simon writes: "We couldn't be married in our church, so we brought the church with us. Members of our beloved community made the journey to Iowa, prayed with us, sang with us, and witnessed our commitment to one other." **When was a time you or your family felt supported by a community? In what ways did your community "show up" for you?**

If you heard John 15:9-17 read aloud at a wedding, you might hear Jesus' words about abiding in love as addressing the couples' love for each other. **What relationship does this passage suggest between a married couple and the wider community in which they live?**

"As we talk together about loving one another as God has loved us, we will be called into larger conversations...." *Your People Shall Be My People* is designed to begin conversations about marriage for all loving and committed couples, but it is definitely not meant to be an end. **What other questions about marriage has this study stirred up in you? What are other institutions or situations affecting marriage and families (e.g. immigration laws, credit card or educational debt, divorce) you would like to explore?**

*** ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation (formerly Lutherans Concerned) advocates for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church and congregations.**

See www.ReconcilingWorks.org

****Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) affirms and supports LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those pursuing a call to rostered leadership, while engaging allied congregations and ministries to proclaim God's love and seek justice for all. One of ELM's main programs is Proclaim, a professional community for Lutheran pastors, rostered lay leaders, candidates, and seminarians who publicly identify as LGBTQ.**

See www.elm.org

Further Questions for Discussion

Why is it important to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people and their families to hear a clear, public message of welcome in their congregations, synods, and elsewhere in the church?

How should congregations welcome, care for, and support LGBTQ people and their families?

In what ways is your own congregation welcoming to LGBTQ people and their families? In what ways is your synod welcoming?

How does your faith inform your perspective on marriage?

In the ELCA, pastors can't be forced to perform marriage ceremonies for anyone they don't want to marry. How does knowing congregations and clergy may either choose or decline to offer weddings for same-gender couples affect your view about civil marriage equality?

How does your congregation or synod inform and share their welcome of LGBTQ people with the larger community?

Frequently Asked Questions

Marriage & ELCA Policy

What does the ELCA social statement on sexuality say about supporting same-gender couples and their families?

The social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) states that the ELCA:

“...recognizes that it has a pastoral responsibility to all children of God.” (p. 19)

“...supports legislation and policies to protect civil rights” for all and has also “called upon congregations and members of this church to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families and to **advocate for their legal protection.**” (p. 19, emphasis added)

“...will attend to the need for **equal protection, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities** under the law” for all (p. 33, emphasis added).

What does the ELCA social statement on sexuality 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.

What is the definition of marriage provided in the social statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*?

“Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God.” (p. 15)

How does the social 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.’” (p. 15)

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 **entering into lifelong monogamous relationships.**” (p. 18 emphasis added)

The social statement explicitly lists four different views that are to be “recognized” by this church. The social statement requires that

the ELCA “will include” these different practices within the life of the ELCA “as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world.” The fourth item in that list reads as follows:

“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.” (pp. 19–20, emphasis added)

What does the ELCA say about performing weddings for same-gender couples?

Pastors may preside over same-gender marriages. Here is what former ELCA Secretary David Swartling said in May 2012 about the ELCA’s policy on marriage:

“First of all, the ELCA governing documents, the constitution and bylaws, say nothing about marriage. Secondly, the ELCA’s policies have never told a local pastor in a congregation who that pastor should marry or should not marry. That is a matter up to the discretion of that pastor in consultation, hopefully, with his or her congregation

and his or her synod. The requirement is that you need to comply with state law. If state laws allow marriage of same-gender persons, there is nothing in ELCA policy that either says that is permissible or prohibited. . . . [T]here is nothing that prescribes who a congregation pastor can marry or not marry, so long as it is consistent with state law.”

See full statement at

[**www.rwks.org/what-do-lutheran-churches-say**](http://www.rwks.org/what-do-lutheran-churches-say)

Resources



STUDY

Freedom to Marry 101: What's It All About?

An adult study for congregations. This helpful resource was developed by the Oregon Synod (ELCA). With permission, it has been adapted slightly for use outside of the Oregon context.

<http://tiny.cc/freedomtomarry101>

Marriage Equality in the 21st Century: What Would Luther Say?

An academic paper written by Sue Best, MSW, LCSW, member of Augustana Lutheran, Portland, Oregon, and a student at the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University.

<http://tiny.cc/WWLS>

Lutheran Theology and the Freedom to Marry

A shorter summary of the above paper, “Marriage Equality in the 21st Century: What Would Luther Say?”

http://tiny.cc/WWLS_summary

What God Has Joined

An analysis of how the personal spheres of trust and commitment associated with marriage are connected to social matters of racial and economic justice. This was the headliner essay for the June 2013 issue of Sojourners magazine, written by Rev. Dr. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary.

<http://tiny.cc/WhatGodHasJoined>

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

The ELCA passed this social statement on human sexuality in 2009. The statement is grounded in the biblical witness to the relationship God establishes with creation as a model for relationships between human beings. God is absolutely trustworthy and faithful, and therefore, with regard to sexuality, both human behavior and social structures are considered in relation to how they foster trust, commitment, and protection for the flourishing and wellbeing of all people. The statement provides guidance on key matters such as marriage, family, same-gender relationships, protecting children and youth, sexuality and the self, sexual intimacy, and cohabitation.

English: <http://tiny.cc/09ELCAHumanSexuality>

Español: http://tiny.cc/09ELCAHumanSexuality_ES

God and the Gay Christian: the Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships (book)

By Matthew Vines. Available from Amazon.com and elsewhere. See also Matthew Vines' online video and transcript at www.MatthewVines.com/Transcript



FILMS

Fish Out of Water (film)

A documentary film showcasing the seven Bible verses most often used to condemn homosexuality and same-gender marriage. The director interviews ministers with a diversity of perspective on human sexuality and the Bible for the film.

[**www.FishOutOfWaterFilm.com**](http://www.FishOutOfWaterFilm.com)

For the Bible Tells Me So (film)

Through the experiences of five Christian families, we discover how insightful people of faith handle the realization of having a gay child. This video offers healing, clarity, and understanding to anyone caught in the crosshairs of scripture and sexual identity.

[**www.ForTheBibleTellsMeSo.org**](http://www.ForTheBibleTellsMeSo.org)

Love Free or Die (film)

A documentary film about Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay person to become a bishop in the historic traditions of Christendom.

[**www.LoveFreeOrDieMovie.com**](http://www.LoveFreeOrDieMovie.com)

The New Black (film)

The New Black is a documentary that tells the story of how the African-American community is grappling with gay rights issues in light of the Freedom to Marry movement and the fight over civil rights. This GLAAD media award nominated film documents activists, families and clergy on both sides of the campaign.

The New Black takes viewers into the pews and onto the streets and provides a seat at the kitchen table as it tells the story of the historic fight to win marriage equality in Maryland and charts the evolution of this complicated issue within the black community.

[**www.NewBlackFilm.com**](http://www.NewBlackFilm.com)



PASTORAL CARE

ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation

ReconcilingWorks has many new, helpful resources. See www.ReconcilingWorks.org and click on the Resources tab.

The Institute for Welcoming Resources

The Institute for Welcoming Resources has a helpful list of pastoral care materials.

www.WelcomingResources.org and click the Resources tab.

Pastoral Considerations for LGBTQ Couples Seeking a Church Wedding

A short primer for those interested in pre-marriage counseling and wedding day considerations. By the Rev. Michael Fick, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois.

<http://tiny.cc/lgbtq-pastoral>

Going to the Chapel: A Quick and Easy Guide for Attending the Ceremony of LGBTQ Friends or Family Members

“So the invitation has come. Maybe you saw it coming. Maybe it’s a surprise! But you’re invited. In this time of greater civil and religious public recognition of LGBTQ relationships, most of us will be invited to such an event sooner or later. Here’s a quick and easy guide to help you make the most of the experience and be a great guest.” By the Rev. Michael Fick, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois.

<http://tiny.cc/lgbt-wedding>

Inclusive Marriage Services: A Wedding Sourcebook

By Kimberly Bracken Long and David Maxwell. The inclusive wedding services in this book provide language that can be used by LGBTQ and straight couples. Includes complete liturgies, additional liturgical material, and brief essays to guide pastors and couples as they plan weddings. Contributors include the Rev. Bradley E. Schmeling, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. (Available from Amazon.com and elsewhere.)

Lutheran Introduction to our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Neighbors

This resource offers a basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

See www.ReconcilingWorks.org/resources/sogi/lgbtq

An Ally's Guide to Terminology: Talking About LGBTQ People & Equality

The words we use to talk about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and issues can have a powerful impact on our conversations. The right words can help open people's hearts and minds, while others can create distance or confusion. Designed for new allies who want to support LGBTQ people but often face an array of confusing terminology and language, this short guide offers an overview of essential vocabulary, terms to avoid, and a few key messages for talking about various issues. Provided by GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and the Movement Advancement Project.

www.glaad.org/publications/talkingabout/terminology



WEDDING LITURGIES

Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) - Marriage

The ELCA's Executive for Worship, through the Office of the Presiding Bishop, is currently developing liturgical resources appropriate for same-gender couples to use within the marriage service of Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW). These resources are expected to be available online later in 2016. ReconcilingWorks will make the link available as soon as these resources become available.

Inclusive Marriage Services: A Wedding Sourcebook

By Kimberly Bracken Long and David Maxwell. The inclusive wedding services in this book provide language that can be used by LGBTQ and straight couples. Includes complete liturgies, additional liturgical material, and brief essays to guide pastors and couples as they plan weddings. Contributors include the Rev. Bradley E. Schmeling, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. (Available from Amazon.com and elsewhere.)

I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing

The Episcopal Church (USA)

The Episcopal Church has authorized liturgical resources appropriate for same-gender couples called *I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing*. This resource includes theological resources for study as well as liturgies. Visit www.churchpublishing.org to search for the resource or download the free rite at

<http://tiny.cc/TECBlessing>

Book of Worship – Order for Marriage

United Church of Christ

This order for marriage has been adapted from the United Church of Christ Book of Worship “Order for Marriage” to provide language that may be used for any marriage, regardless of gender.

See http://tiny.cc/UCC_Order_Marriage

Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)

– Affirmation of Marriage

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Those who have been legally married and who wish to have their marriage affirmed by their faith community may choose the Affirmation of Marriage liturgy in the in ELW Occasional Services volume. It utilizes language appropriate for same-gender couples.



The following resources can be found at
www.ReconcilingWorks.org/Resources/RIC

Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program: FAQs

Common questions about the RIC program of public welcome.

Sample Affirmation of Welcome Statements

A sampling of welcoming statements in use at one or more of our current RIC settings. For use as guides, templates, or inspiration in writing an affirmation that proclaims the unique commitment to welcome in your community.

Our Congregation Is Already Welcoming, Why Do We Need to Say So?

The importance of a public welcome.

Lutheran Introduction to our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Neighbors

This resource offers a basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Your Congregation Is RIC: Now What? (coming soon!)

Ideas to move forward with inclusive ministry in your congregation: A practical guide, including action steps your congregation can take.

Building an Inclusive Church Training

The Building an Inclusive Church (BIC) training program helps you design and implement a journey for your congregation to publicly and intentionally welcome people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. The BIC training equips you with ways to create dialogue, deepening relationships throughout the congregation rather than sparking debate and division. Offered by ReconcilingWorks. www.ReconcilingWorks.org/BIC

Also see the **BIC Welcoming Toolkit**, a Biblically based, step-by-step guide to help facilitate a Welcoming Process in your local congregation. The Toolkit provides tools for relational organizing, congregational assessment, conflict management, and change theory. www.ReconcilingWorks.org/BIC

Your People Shall Be My People

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1669 Arcade Street Suite 2

Saint Paul, Minnesota 55106-1054

651-665-0861 ~ info@ReconcilingWorks.org

www.ReconcilingWorks.org ~ [FB.com/ReconcilingWorks](https://www.facebook.com/ReconcilingWorks)

Twitter: [@ReconcilingWrks](https://twitter.com/ReconcilingWrks)

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ReconcilingWorks
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



How should congregations
welcome, care for, and
support lesbian, gay,
bisexual, transgender,
and queer people
and their families?

What do families
need to be safe
and secure?

What can your
church do to help?

What is your congregation's
role in supporting children
with lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender, and parents?