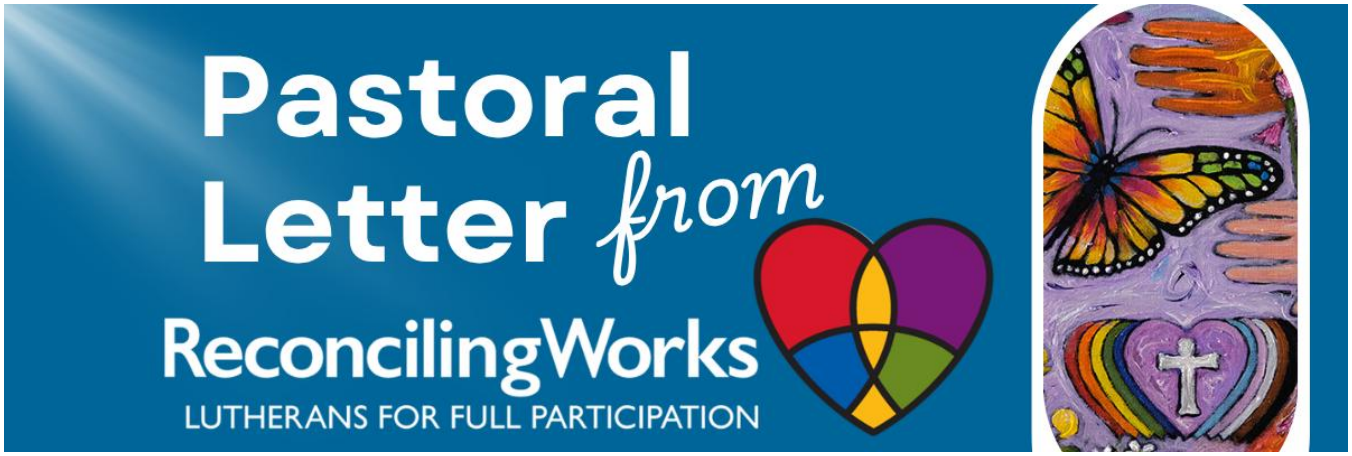

A Pastoral Letter from ReconcilingWorks

On the ongoing work of the Task Force and the Revisions to the ELCA's Human Sexuality Social Statement.

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

As followers of Jesus, we are continually called to return to the heart of the Gospel: God's abundant love made known through Christ. In every generation, the Church is invited to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling us to proclaim that love more faithfully, embody justice more fully, and bear witness to God's reconciling work in the world.

Today, conversations surrounding sex, gender, sexuality, and marriage continue to shape the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the wider Church. Through prayer, study, conversation, and lived experience, faithful Lutherans continue to seek God's wisdom as we strive to love both God and our neighbors.

In **Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**, the ELCA recognizes that faithful Lutherans hold multiple conscience-bound understandings regarding marriage and human sexuality. ReconcilingWorks honors the ELCA's commitment to respectful theological discernment while affirming the fourth conscience-bound understanding articulated in the social statement is the closest to aligning with ReconcilingWorks values:

> "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." (HSS pg. 21)

This conviction is woven throughout our ministry and continues to guide our mission. **ReconcilingWorks advocates for the acceptance, full participation, and liberation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions within the Lutheran Church.** We believe that marriages between people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, and that God's diversity expressed in those relationships, are holy. We do so because we believe God's invitation into love is not limited by a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Marriage is a sacred vocation rooted in mutual love, shared responsibility, public accountability, hospitality, and service to one another and the world. These gifts are not defined by the genders of those entering the covenant but by the fruits they bear through lives of faithful discipleship.

As we reflect and provide feedback to the ELCA's Task Force working to make updates to this critical Social Statement, ReconcilingWorks invites you to reflect on the impact this document and how it is worded has an impact on all three expressions of the church, our community, and world.

1. **It is imperative this social statement does not limit its scope of inclusion through the binary language of "same-gender couples." By doing so it limits the expansive creativity of the Divine that is reflected in the creation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Replacing binary language with "consenting adults" could alleviate some of the harm and exclusion the current language perpetuates.**

2. **To name hetero normativity assimilation as the expectation of consenting adults of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expression creates an unrealistic and harmful "norm" that is not found in the fullness of human existence.**

3. **The ELCA has clear Social Messages and Social Statements that name discrimination based on sex is not within how we see ourselves as church.**

   > **"While members may hold differing views on matters related to sexual orientation or gender identity, this church is nevertheless united in opposing discrimination, objectification, abuse, or control of the bodies of women, girls, or individuals who identify as genderqueer" (ELCA social statement Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action: page 61).**

   So, how is it the Human Sexuality Social Statement does not abide by this and allows clear discrimination, objectification, and control of bodies of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions through the cloak of bound conscience?

For generations, people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions have faithfully served Christ and the Church. They have nurtured children, cared for aging parents, visited the sick, comforted those who mourn, fed the hungry, advocated for justice, served as pastors,

deacons, musicians, teachers, and lay leaders, and built households grounded in enduring love and mutual commitment. Their lives reflect the very fruits Jesus calls us to recognize.

Our commitment remains steadfast. ReconcilingWorks will continue to advocate for the acceptance, full participation, and liberation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions within the Lutheran Church. We believe the Church is most fully itself when every person is welcomed as a beloved child of God, every vocation is honored, every family is valued, and every marriage is celebrated with equal dignity and joy.

We envision a Church where people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions never question whether they belong; where every child sees their family reflected in the life of the Church; where love is celebrated equally; and where all people hear the liberating promise that they are created in the image of God, called by name, and claimed as beloved.

May the Holy Spirit continue to lead the Church toward deeper faithfulness, greater justice, and more expansive love.

In Christ's peace,

ReconcilingWorks
We believe that God values and embraces each person as a beloved child, that the Spirit gives a diversity of gifts for the common good, and that Jesus Christ calls us to work for justice.

Providing Feedback to the ELCA Task Force:

As you prepare to **provide feedback through the online Survey Monkey form** to the ELCA you are welcome to share the language below directly, or as a thought prompt for your own reflection.

Question 8: *Which of the four positions of conscience described in pages 20-21 of the social statement most accurately reflects your beliefs?*

Question 9: *If none of the four positions described in the social statement reflect your own beliefs, what new description might you add?*

> On the basis of conscience-bound belief, many are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today, nor was homosexuality included in scriptural witness prior to 1946. They believe that the

neighbor and community are best served when any and all relationships are lived out with intentional and consensual commitment and are held to cultural and ethical norms that vary from relationship to relationship while honoring the dignity and humanity of those in relationship. They surround such families and their commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe humans of all genders are deserving of having their relationship status respected, and 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.

Question 10: *What other comments do you have for the task force?*

a. It is imperative this social statement does not limit its scope of inclusion through the binary language of "same-gender couples." By doing so it limits the expansive creativity of the Divine that is reflected in the creation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Replacing binary language with "consenting adults" could alleviate some of the harm and exclusion the current langue perpetuates.

b. To name hetero normativity assimilation as the expectation of consenting adults of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expression creates an unrealist and harmful "norm" that is not found in the fullness of human existence.

c. The ELCA has clear Social Messages and Social Statements that name discrimination based on sex is not within how we see ourselves as church.

> "While members may hold differing views on matters related to sexual orientation or gender identity, this church is nevertheless united in opposing discrimination, objectification, abuse, or control of the bodies of women, girls, or individuals who identify as genderqueer" (ELCA social statement **Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action**: page 61).

So, how is it the Human Sexuality Social Statement does not abide by this, and allows clear discrimination, objectification, and control of bodies of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, through the cloak of bound conscious?