



Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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Rocky Mountain Synod

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Dear Partners in ministry,

I trust that you have had the opportunity to read through Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust: A proposed social statement from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. Today the statement is released to the public. You may be receiving calls, as I have, from local media. I have no doubt that many members of our congregations will be reading it.

I also know that others will be unaware of the statement, and/or the process for consideration of the document by the Churchwide Assembly. In addition to reading the proposed social statement, which has been significantly revised, I encourage you to pay attention to the executive summary and the talking points made available to you. Of course, the *Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies* will be of great interest to many, and perhaps the first place to which they will turn. I do urge you to read through both documents.

Note that the documents now move to the Program Committee of the Church in Society Unit, the Conference of Bishops, and the ELCA Church Council. It is the council, meeting at the end of March, which will send the proposed statement and the report and recommendations document on to the Assembly, and which may amend the work of the Task Force.

*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is the result of much conversation throughout this church. Every member and congregation of the ELCA has had multiple opportunities over the last eight years to respond and contribute to the evolving document. This version may yet be amended by the Assembly. You will find it to be shorter and less technical than the first version. The central themes of relationship and trust are still prominent throughout the document. Note the helpful footnotes on trust (#2), the left hand of God (#14 and #15), and the careful explanation of bound conscience (#26).

The social statement names the complexity and variety of positions among us on these issues. At the same time, it reminds us "...we believe that the way we order our lives

in matters of human sexuality, although important for us as people of faith, is not central to the gospel itself." (Lines 299-301) The text also boldly names both the life-giving creativity of our sexuality, as well as the destructiveness of the commercial and cultural perversions of God's gifts. In the context of an individualistic, even self-serving culture, the statement strongly affirms the necessities of strong social fabric and community.

There is much here for congregations to talk through, not the least of which are the concerns about guiding our children toward a healthy, mature sexuality. And there is a great deal to consider about fidelity in marriage.

At the 2007 Churchwide Assembly, the Task Force was charged with providing a *Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies*. Reading this report reminds me again that the Task Force, throughout its work, represented the broad spectrum of opinion in this church. The Social Statement does not compel the course proposed in the recommendations, but is congruent with them. If the Assembly were to move toward

resolution four, it would add a new element of flexibility to the existing structure of decision-making which this church employs in affirming and guiding ministry candidates. The document lays out a potential way in which the usual decision-makers, candidacy committees, seminaries, bishops, call-committees, and congregations might consistently and locally move forward with candidates, according to church-wide standards.

Nothing has yet changed. Of course the Churchwide Assembly will prayerfully grapple with and discern these issues. As a church, we have been at these conversations for fifteen years. They have sometimes been quite difficult, even divisive and volatile. But I have been grateful for this church's growing maturity and deepening ability to engage these difficult conversations. I deeply believe the Holy Spirit is in the midst of our struggles for clarity and compassion. I am hopeful.

I pray for continuing blessings on your ministry and on your faith community.

Bishop Allan Bjornberg