

# CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

April 2008

## Lutheran CORE leaders respond to draft social statement

Leaders of Lutheran CORE have responded to the release of the ELCA's "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality" by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality.

Lutheran CORE is a coalition of pastors, lay people, congregations and reforming groups. We seek to preserve within the ELCA the authority of God's Word according to the Lutheran confessions.

"It is important to recognize that this is the first draft of a social statement on sexuality," said the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. "We encourage ELCA members to study the draft and to take the time to submit responses to the Task Force supporting areas where the statement is strong and suggesting ways that the statement can be improved."

"There is a lot in the statement that can be affirmed, but there are some glaring theological errors here," said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

"The draft statement would change the definition of marriage by implication. This is a cause of great concern," Spring said. "Lutherans have traditionally defined marriage as 'a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman.' The statement calls marriage a relationship of love and trust between two people. From this perspective,

the statement opens the door to supporting same-gender committed relationships."

"Lutherans have traditionally addressed sexuality biblically by starting with creation and noting that God created humans male and female. The draft statement seems to have avoided those biblical passages and that perspective of human sexuality," Spring explained. "There is a surprising absence of procreation as a purpose of marriage," he added.

"While I appreciate the work and the dedication of the members of the task force in writing this draft, I must express my profound disappointment at the weakness of this statement," said the Rev. Erma Wolf, vice chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. "However, I strongly encourage people across the ELCA to read this statement and to submit their responses to the task force. This statement, if passed, will be the basis for teaching and for future policies in this area. The task force needs to hear from the congregations and the baptized people of God in order to have a statement that will truly serve the mission of the church in boldly following her Lord, Jesus Christ." Wolf is associate pastor of the Brandon-Split Rock Lutheran Parish in Brandon, S.D.

The first draft of the social statement is available online at [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney). Free copies may also be requested by

calling 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2996. Members of ELCA congregations have the opportunity to respond to the draft until Nov. 1.

Following an eight-month period of input from members of ELCA congregations, a second draft of the statement will be prepared. The revised draft is scheduled to be released in February 2009 along with the Task Force's recommendations on whether the ELCA should change its policies to permit pastors and other "rostered leaders" to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Aug. 17-23, 2009) will decide whether to adopt an ELCA social statement on human sexuality and whether to change policies.

Social statements explain what the ELCA understands to be Scripture's teaching and faithful Christian responses to a given topic. They are intended as teaching statements addressing the members of ELCA congregations to help them in their own ethical decision-making. Social statements also shape the activities of ELCA organizations as they address social issues through church policy and efforts to influence government action.

Lutheran CORE will continue to make resources available to help ELCA members participate in the process leading to an ELCA social statement on human sexuality.

## Retired ELCA bishops offer response to draft

Retired ELCA bishops Kenneth Sauer and Paull Spring prepared a response to the ELCA “Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality” on behalf of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

The response notes areas of agreement with the current draft as well as areas of concern: “There is much in the draft that we can commend and applaud. Unfortunately, there are also elements in the draft statement that are troubling, even worrisome, to us.”

Among positive areas noted by Sauer and Spring:

- “The draft touches on many theological themes that characterize specifically Lutheran perspectives. Notable in the draft are, among others, presentations on the Word of God as Law and Gospel, the uses of the Law, the centrality of justification, and the understanding of believers as simultaneously sinners and redeemed.”

- “The way the draft addresses many current issues on sexuality. We lift up especially the role of the family, the abuses of sexuality in our society, and the dominating influence of advertising and the media in our culture.”

Sauer and Spring noted five areas of special concern in the draft statement:

- “The definition of marriage. True, marriage is affirmed as a covenant of fidelity between one man and one woman. But this definition is not consistently maintained throughout the draft. . . . There are few references to procreation as one of the chief purposes of marriage. The discussion

on marriage and homosexuality is itself unbalanced — one sentence for heterosexual marriage and several sentences on homosexual unions.”

- “There are numerous references in the draft to ‘pastoral’ and ‘pastoral care.’ . . . The Lutheran heritage understands pastoral care to be a personal address that is based on God’s Word of both Law and Gospel. By contrast, pastoral care in the draft appears to be largely a matter of affirmation and support.”

- “The confusing use of the category of trust in social relationships and institutions. . . . Trust is an appropriate category to use in the God-human relationship and to relationships among humans. But, in view of the two kingdoms doctrine, the Christian’s life in society — family, state, education, commerce, the arts — is more characterized by justice, reliability, and order, rather than trust.”

- “The draft places the whole matter of sexuality within the saving work of Christ, the Gospel. The Lutheran tradition, by contrast, places sexuality within the doctrines of creation and the Law. Human sexuality is part of God’s created order for the world.”

- “The draft itself seems confused and disjointed. It is not always easy to discern how one theme leads to another. A much better way of dealing with the issues of marriage, family, and sexuality would be to move clearly from Biblical interpretation to practical application. We also wish that the draft had incorporated the more direct affirmations on sexuality from The American Lutheran Church and

Lutheran Church in America statements on sexuality and from the ELCA Church Council’s 1996 message, “Some Common Convictions.”

Sauer was the bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod and was chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops. Spring was the bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. Their entire response is available at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).

## Question and Answers document explains sexuality discussions

Lutheran CORE has prepared a resource to help members of ELCA congregations to participate in the process leading to an ELCA Social Statement on Sexuality and to enable them to better understand some of the questions on human sexuality that will be considered at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The Q & A document addresses basic questions about the process and about current ELCA policy. It also responds to some of the arguments made for changing Christian teaching on homosexual behavior. Questions are addressed in a basic way that is easy to understand.

The resource is available online at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).

