

## **Changes made to Standards for ELCA Pastors in 2010**

The ELCA Church Council made changes to the ELCA's standards for pastors and other rostered leaders on April 10, 2010. These changes illustrate the significance and meaning of the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The standards are articulated in two documents — called “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.”

The documents are available online at [www.elca.org/ministry/policies](http://www.elca.org/ministry/policies).

Here are some of the changes approved by the ELCA Church Council on April 10, 2010:

### **Marriage no longer normative setting for sexual relations Biblical understanding no longer normative for sexual relations**

■ A sentence which stated that “the biblical understanding which this church affirms is that the normative setting for sexual intercourse is marriage” was deleted from “Definition and Guidelines.”

### **Homosexual relationships are no longer forbidden Same-gender partnerships are now an alternative to marriage**

■ A sentence which read: “Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church” was deleted from “Definition and Guidelines.” Instead, references to a pastor's spouse now include the option of the pastor having a “same-gender partner.”

■ A sentence which read: “Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships” was deleted from “Vision and Expectations.”

In its place is a sentence that reads: “An ordained minister who is in a publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship is expected to live in fidelity to his or her partner, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a publicly accountable relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful.”

### **No *Christian* ideals of marriage?**

■ A sentence in “Definitions and Guidelines” that asked pastors “to uphold *Christian* ideals of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life” has been changed to read: “Ordained ministers of this church are expected to uphold *this church's* ideals of marriage, family, and relationship in their public ministry as well as in private life.”

## **Marriage vs. Same-gender relationships**

“Vision and Expectations” makes a distinction between “marriage” — “between a man and a woman” — and “publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” The document includes the ELCA’s definition of a “publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship.”

In spite of that distinction, throughout both documents, marriage and committed same-sex relationships are often treated as equivalent.

### **Required respect for different convictions on homosexual behavior**

“Vision and Expectations” notes that the ELCA has committed itself to recognize and support same-sex relationships and to allow pastors to be in those relationships. But it notes that the ELCA “also has committed itself to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in such relationships.”

“The ordained minister is expected to respect the people who hold these various convictions,” it states.

It is unknown how the ELCA will define “respect” for those who hold beliefs that many pastors believe are contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture or how it will enforce this requirement.

### **Faithfulness to Scripture and Christian tradition still required?**

“Vision & Expectations” states that “Ordained ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures ‘as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life’ (ELCA Constitution, 2.03). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran Confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

“In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its ordained ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its ordained ministers teach nothing ‘that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church’ (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession).”

These documents fail to note that changes in ELCA teaching and practice on same-sex relationships depart from the teaching of the Scriptures, the catholic Church tradition, and the Lutheran Confessions. The new ELCA social statement on sexuality acknowledges that same-sex marriage “differs from the historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions.”