

## **An Open Letter to the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops**

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — both pastors and lay people — we care deeply about the life and ministry of the ELCA. Because of our commitment to Christ and the Church, we cannot support the adoption of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* in its current form. We respectfully request that the social statement that you recommend to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly be significantly different from the current text.

We are grateful for the members of the Task Force who have given themselves to this difficult work for the sake of the Church. We realize that very different theological perspectives on human sexuality are represented on the Task Force and are present in the ELCA. Coming to agreement on language that would be acceptable to all must have been difficult. However, as a document that will provide teaching and policy for the ELCA for years to come, a social statement on human sexuality must be more than acceptable, it must be faithful to the consistent witness of Scripture on human sexuality.

We are very supportive of portions of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. We support the affirmation of marriage as a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman and as the most appropriate place for physical intimacy. We appreciate the concern expressed about cohabitation, promiscuity, premarital sex, and our sexualized society and its many victims. We support the call for pastoral care and compassion for all people.

The ELCA Confession of Faith states: “This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (ELCA Constitution 2.03). However, *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* distances us from our biblical heritage. We ask that you allow Scripture to be the *source* of the statement’s teaching on sexuality by moving clearly from biblical interpretation to practical application in dealing with issues of marriage, family, and sexuality. We also ask that you allow Scripture to be the *norm* of the statement’s teaching on sexuality by clearly affirming biblical norms for sexuality and sexual behavior.

*Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* confuses the role of Law and Gospel in addressing human sexuality. A social statement naturally flows from the Law. It describes God’s intention for us and for society. God uses the Law both to order the world and to reveal our sinfulness. The Lutheran tradition places sexuality within the doctrines of creation and the Law. The draft attempts to place sexuality within the saving work of Christ, the Gospel. Incarnation and justification are key to understanding salvation, but creation and God’s Law shape Christian understandings of sexuality and ethics. God uses Christ’s birth, death and resurrection to provide salvation, but God uses creation and the Law — including Jesus’ own teaching — to reveal God’s intentions for sexual morality. We ask that you affirm human sexuality as a part of God’s created order for the world and affirm marriage as God’s intention for humanity “from the beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6-9, Genesis 2:24). We also ask that you affirm the role of the Ten Commandments in sexual ethics, especially the Sixth Commandment. We recommend that you rewrite the theological foundation for discussing sexuality in a way that acknowledges the role of God in shaping creation and the role of God’s law in ordering society.

*Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* rightly affirms that we are justified by grace through faith. We ask that the social statement you present in 2009 affirm that all are sinners who are justified by grace through faith but also recognize that God justifies sinners rather than justifying sins. We also request that you note the difference between forgiveness and acceptance. God forgives sinners and accepts them, but God’s

acceptance of sinners does not mean that God accepts sins. We request that you maintain the relationship and order of the two great commandments from Jesus: love for God and love for neighbor (Mark 12:29-31).

*Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* fails to acknowledge the Scriptural prohibitions of homosexual behavior in both Old Testament and New Testament. It also fails to recognize the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly decision to “continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops” which clearly stated that “there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship.” We respectfully request that you acknowledge both the teaching of Scripture and the content of Christian tradition regarding homosexual behavior.

*Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* does not provide a helpful framework for members of the ELCA to consider areas of human sexuality. ELCA social statements are to provide a framework for ethical decision making by ELCA members. They must be written in a way that most church members can understand and apply to their lives. The 1996 ELCA Church Council Message *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* is much more helpful. The 1996 Message and the social statements of the ELCA’s predecessor churches explain matters of sexuality in a way that is both easy to understand and faithful. The ELCA would do better to continue to rely on these existing documents than to adopt the current draft. We suggest that you draw on these documents in significant ways in drafting the social statement that you will recommend in 2009. We ask that you draw content for the statement more directly from traditional Christian interpretation of Scripture and the Christian moral tradition.

We offer this response to *Draft Statement on Human Sexuality* because of our commitment to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We will continue to pray for the ELCA and for you as you work to draft a social statement on human sexuality that is faithful to Scripture and to traditional Christian interpretations of Scripture and that will guide the ELCA and its members for years to come.

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*ELCA members are invited to add their names to this open letter. You may request that your name be added to this open letter by sending an e-mail with your name and address to [info@lutherancore.org](mailto:info@lutherancore.org). You may also send your request to: Lutheran CORE; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112.*