

Human Sexuality and Report on Ministry: A Response

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“Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” the newly proposed social statement on human sexuality, along with the Task Force’s “Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies,” present for consideration in the ELCA a wide-ranging document on sexuality and suggest changes to the denomination’s current practices. In partial response, the pastors of this congregation offer the following teaching on specific points from the documents and recommendations. Since we submit to the authority of Scripture in all matters of life and faith, we are deeply troubled by the document and the threat it poses to the unity we hold in the Word of God. We ask therefore that everyone join us in prayer for the church and in careful study of the issues raised.

Note: The quotes from the document appear alongside their line numbers in the documents, with the pastors’ comments indented.

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Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

588ff “Some . . . conclude that marriage is also the appropriate term to use in describing similar benefits, protection and support for same-gender couples entering into lifelong monogamous relationships.”

1. The Bible defines marriage as when **a man shall leave his father and his mother and holds fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh** (Gen 2.24). Marriage is the union of two who are complementary but different. Virtually all societies and cultures have recognized the same. This new understanding of marriage is therefore a fundamental departure from both the biblical pattern and the overwhelming consensus of Christian tradition.

653ff “Some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today.”

1. The apostle Paul undoubtedly knew of homosexual relations—male and female—that were committed and appeared to be loving. The ancient world was familiar with lesbianism, for example, where this was often the case, and Paul addresses it specifically: **For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature** (Rom 1.26). Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium* shows that Paul’s world also knew about consensual male homosexual relationships. Paul addresses male homosexuality specifically in Rom 1.24-27; 1 Cor 6.9-10, and 1 Tim 1.10.
2. When the Bible condemns same-sex genital relations, it focuses on the acts themselves, not the conditions of those acts. The intent of the heart of the actors involved does not matter; it is the act itself that is called an **abomination** and **contrary to nature**.

- a. **You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination** (Lev 18.22).
- b. **And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error** (Rom 1.27).

758-61 “This church acknowledges with regret the way in which the misuse of historical teachings concerning sexuality has harmed individuals, deepened suffering, or torn families apart [such as] . . . hate crimes and violence against those who are regarded as sexually different.”

1. We denounce, in the strongest terms, those who have used Scripture as justification for harming others. But we must also defend orthodox teachings about sexuality. Rejection of hate in the name of Christ should not cause us to shrink from embracing God’s unchanging design for human sexuality.

855-56, 864 “This church reaffirms what it has said previously about providing comprehensive sex education within the context of Christian faith. This education must begin early . . . [and include] information about birth control, including the encouragement and support of sexual abstinence.”

1. If sex education includes this teaching about sex and marriage, which would support marriage for same-sex couples and denies the relevance of biblical bans on gay practice, then this would be teaching things contrary to Scripture and tradition.
2. Research suggests that sex education that teaches birth control methods a) does not reduce teen pregnancy, and b) may actually encourage greater sexual activity. (“Another Look at the Evidence: Abstinence versus Comprehensive Sex Education in Our Schools,” *Institute for Research & Evaluation* [February 2009], 1-4.)

1025-27 “All sexually active people have the responsibility to protect their sexual partner from both emotional and physical harm as well as to protect themselves and their partners from sexually transmitted diseases.”

1. In a church founded by Luther on the principle of *sola scriptura*, we would expect the word “spouse” for any reference to sexual relationship, since marriage is the only context which Scripture sanctions for sexual relationship. The phrase “sexual partner” has been used by a political movement intent on replacing biblical and traditional norms with the values of secular society.

1046, 1056-57 “This church . . . does not favor cohabitation arrangements outside of marriage. . . It should be noted that some cohabitation arrangements can be construed in ways that are neither casual nor intrinsically unstable.”

1. This is unclear teaching. It opens the door to those who think living apart will create “extreme economic hardship” (1041-42) and cohabitation can provide “stability.”

2. Research shows that cohabitation is inherently unstable because there is no final commitment, and in fact leads to a higher divorce rate and greater abuse, both for adults and children. (*Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences* [Institute for American Values, 2005], esp. nos. 2, 3, 8, 12, 22, 23, 25).
3. Cohabitation is fornication, and Jesus condemns all **fornication** as **evil** (Mark 7.21, 23).

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

Frequently Asked Questions

This document says that “human sexuality” is not “central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (page 3).

1. Then why does Jesus condemn **sexual immorality** as **evil**, and say it will **defile a person** or cut them off from God (Mark 7.21, 23)?
 - a. Jews knew that *porneia* (the word Jesus used here for **sexual immorality**) was defined by Lev. 18 & 20, where same-gender sex was the only sexual sin labeled **an abomination** (18.22; 20.13).
 - b. Jesus seems to be saying here that sexual purity is central to living his Gospel. See also Matt 5.27-30.
2. Paul says that those who are **justified . . . through faith in Jesus Christ** (Gal 2.15-16) must **walk by the Spirit** and **not gratify the desires of the flesh** such as **sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality** (Gal 5.16, 19).
 - a. For Paul too, sexual purity is integral to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He says the same sort of thing in all his epistles (Rom 6.1-4; 1 Cor 6.12-20; Eph 4.19; 5.3-14; Phil 2.15; Col 3.5-8, etc.).
3. At the pivotal gathering of believers at the Jerusalem Council, it was decreed that Gentile converts to Christianity must abstain from “sexual immorality” (the same *porneia* we saw above), which all Jews knew was a ban on same-sex acts (Acts 15.20). The late-1st-century *Didache* also emphasized this central doctrine of the early church: “You shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication” (chapter 2).

Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies

102-03 “. . . the seven biblical texts that refer directly to same-gender sexual activity . . .”

1. This is misleading. There are many more texts that refer to same-sex activity, and always negatively, such as Jude 7 (**Sodom and Gomorrah . . . indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire**) and Mark 7.21, 23 where Jesus calls *porneia* (which all first-century Jews knew referred to sexual sin outlined in Lev. 18 & 20, in which same-sex activity is the only sexual sin called an **abomination**) **evil**.
2. Besides, marriage is the chief metaphor the Bible uses, from beginning to end, of God’s relationship to his people. And marriage is clearly defined in

Scripture as the union of a man and a woman, two persons who are complementary but different (Gen. 1 & 2).

176-78 “These [biblical] texts and others convey neither a rejection of those Christians whose orientation is to people of the same gender nor a rejection of lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships that bless the world.”

1. Scripture says God does not reject anyone who comes in repentance asking for forgiveness. But it clearly rejects all same-sex sexual activity, and makes no exception for those who say they will embrace this activity but only with one person. This exception would open the door to “monogamous” lifelong incestuous relationships.

159-60 “Although sin may lead to unhealthy and unfaithful conduct among all people, there are same-gender-oriented individuals and couples whose lives and faithfulness are morally commendable and who seek to live as faithful Christians in accord with the will of God.”

1. This is bad logic. It presumes that if people are faithful in other areas of their lives, we cannot recognize their sin as sin. What if we are trying to be faithful in other areas of our lives, but fail to exercise self-control with alcohol? Should we then say our drunkenness is not sin? Or that a Lutheran cheating on his wife but living faithfully otherwise is in the clear?

322-24 et al - This document calls repeatedly for providing “public affirmation” to same-sex couples who commit to lifelong, monogamous relationships.

1. Yet this is giving public affirmation to what the Bible calls sin (Rom 1. 26-27).
2. It will send a hopelessly confused message to our youth and singles: individuals with same-sex desires are told they can fulfill their sexual desires outside marriage, and are publicly affirmed for it; but those with other-sex desires are told they must refrain.

339-41 et al – This document seeks to “find a way for people in . . . lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.”

1. God’s Word tells us, **This is the will of God . . . that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God . . . For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness** (1 Thess 4.3-7).
2. God also calls deacons and ministers to be **above reproach**, which means, among other things, in pure relationships that are not open to question, such as the **husband of one wife**. They are to live **self-controlled, upright and godly lives** (Titus 1.6; 2.12). They are also to **hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught** (Titus 1.9).
 - a. Rostered leaders who are in same-sex relationships are not likely to teach **the trustworthy word as taught** in Scripture (Titus 1.9) on the meaning of sex and marriage. For they have been rostered in clear opposition to both Scripture and what the church has taught on sex and marriage for 2000 years.