

**South Dakota Synod, ELCA  
Hearing on the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality  
Elmen Center, Augustana College  
Sioux Falls, SD  
May 31, 2008**

Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla led devotions.

Rev. Ray Engh led the assembly in prayer.

Rev. Malpica thanked the Assembly for the opportunity to be with them and hear their comments on the draft social statement. He stated the whole church is discussing this document and the task force is gathering feedback about the document. Rev. Malpica encouraged individuals and congregations to continue discussing the document and provide feedback to the task force. The deadline for responses Nov. 1, 2008. The tentative timeline is as follows: the proposed statement, implementing resolutions and roster recommendations will be presented to the Church Council in January 2009; the same documents will be posted to a confidential web site available to rostered leaders in February 2009; followed by availability for all on a public web site; the Conference of Bishops will review the proposed statement in March 2009; Synod Councils may bring recommendations to the Church Council February – April 2009; the Church Council will review resolutions from synods March 2009; Synod Assemblies may respond to the social statement, implementing resolutions and roster recommendations April – June 2009; the social statement, implementing resolutions and roster recommendations will be before the Churchwide Assembly August 2009.

Rev. Engh stated he would call for comments section by section.

**Introduction (Section I)**

(C) Pastor Keith Smith, Trinity-Zoar, Revillo, referenced page 2, lines 21-22, stating this is confusing. In his opinion human sexuality has not changed. Lines 17-18 speak of the complex social and cultural issues around human sexuality – this is what has changed, not God's creation of human sexuality.

**Theological and ethical foundations for understanding sexuality (Section II)**

(C) Pastor Erma Wolf, Brandon Lutheran, Brandon, stated the theological basis of incarnation and justification for this draft statement is in error and in confusion of law and gospel. Christian ethics, especially sexual ethics, have been grounded in the story of creation. Pastor Wolf stated she finds it puzzling that this statement grounds itself in incarnation rather than first in the creative order from God's actions in the beginning in the creation of male and female; then bring in discussion of incarnation in a world that has fallen into sin. The draft statement confuses law and gospel and uses the gospel in a way it is not intended to function.

(A) Pastor David Baer, Immanuel, Whitewood, affirms the section beginning on line 390 of pages 14-15 that states scripture is the primary source. Pastor Baer stated it is important and essential for the church to say the scripture has a word about sexuality and how it shapes our life and our morality.

(C) Pastor Baer agrees with statements the top of page 15 that scripture is not used by itself, but stated the draft statement seems to dismiss scripture from this discussion – it should be used to shape us as a church.

### **Sexuality as part of God's creative activity (Section III)**

No comments

### **Trust at the heart of faith active in love (Section IV)**

(I) Pastor David Baer, Immanuel, Whitewood, stated he is not sure the trust language is the right word and approach when speaking about sexuality. The church challenges people to be trustworthy, faithful, and responsible – these words need to be included rather than just the word/idea of trust.

(A) Pastor Siri Sorenson, Grace, Sioux Falls, spoke in support of the statements about protecting children. The church speaks with a prophetic voice of what is happening in society. There are many avenues for children to be hurt and exploited. It is good the statement addresses these issues and affirms that we as a church need to speak out against this and say that things should be different in society. We need to speak for those who can't speak for themselves.

(I) Pastor Jeff Otterman, St. James, Belle Fourche, stated it would be helpful if the statement was written by one person rather than multiple writers with varying writing styles. For example, line 836 on page 28 regarding the endocrine system. This sounds very scientific, but has no reference point -- don't be so poetic, just say what it means.

(I, C) Pastor Erma Wolf, Brandon Lutheran, Brandon, stated there is much she likes in the marriage section beginning on page 33. However, she is struck by line 1005 on page 33. She questions whether the statements regarding marriage being blessed by God are incomplete. As Christians, we have been taught and believe that marriage is ordained by God. Nowhere in either the section on commitment and sexuality or marriage is there much of any reference to the strong and beautiful Biblical language where marriage is seen as a picture as Jesus' relationship with us as a church and God's relationship with us as a covenant people. The 6<sup>th</sup> commandment regarding faithfulness in marriage should also be included. The statement lacks true gender language. There is no reference to husband and wife, it is usually just spouse; there is not much reference to husband, father, mother, wife.

(I) Pastor Bruce Thalacker, South Canyon, Rapid City, stated the wording regarding marriage and procreation is troubling. Line 1021-1022 on page 33 (...within which the conception of children is a cause for gladness) should be reworded. Procreation goes far beyond a cause for gladness.

(C) Cindy Sampson, Our Savior's, Highmore, stated there is lack of gender descriptions. She disagrees with line 1152 on page 37 which references the historic origin of the term marriage. It is not historic, it is God breathed.

### **Social trust and the common good (Section V)**

(I) Pastor Mindy Ehrke, Salem, Mount Vernon, Storla and Trinity, Letcher, stated the paragraph beginning on line 1345 on page 44 should be reworded – she has no idea what this means.

(C) A member from Brandon Lutheran, Brandon, stated the sentence in lines 1243-1244 on page 40 should be removed. He stated there is no excuse economically for how we live our lives. Can this be extrapolated into other areas of our behavior – excusing not living according to God's law just because of our economic status?

## **Conclusion (Section VI)**

(C) Mark Zimmerman, Zion, Aberdeen. (Mr. Zimmerman provided the text of his comments and requested it be included in the record of the hearing.) "Please bear with me. The Holy Spirit has given me some hard words to say. I will try to do so with gentleness and respect. My wife and I are 27 year Lutherans. We would like to stay in the ELCA, but it is getting very hard to do so. The fact is that for those of us that feel the word of God is being compromised – what option is there for us? We are being marginalized, isolated and alienated. You have congregations, clergy and lay people who have wholly or partially given up on the ELCA and who are dropping out, some while staying in. What is needed is the return to the authority of scripture. The issue of homosexuality has touched our family. We have seen and lived with the physical, relational and spiritual destruction of this lifestyle. We have also been called and commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ to show compassion, mercy and assistance to all of mankind. By the grace of God, we have endeavored to do so, without condoning or praising this lifestyle. We believe God's word and law speaks clearly on these issues. So what is needed from this body, this weekend? First, and most importantly, repentance. Secondly, what is needed from this body is leadership. You are God's shepherds and stewards of his holy word. You are to lead your flock. Stand firm in the word of God and do not let the secular world squeeze you into its mold. We laity of the church that are rooted in the word of God are asking the leadership of this church to take a stand consistent with the word of God. We are asking you to recommend that the pastoral response from the pastors and congregations should be to advocate repentance and celibacy to homosexuals and same-gendered couples. We would also recommend that this church should continue to welcome homosexuals and same-gendered couples, show them compassion and mercy and share with them in a loving way the Holy Scriptures and gospel with the utmost humility and clarity. We are asking that you make a statement to this effect to the national church and hold their feet to the fire to take the same stand. Augustine, Luther and Calvin all have said, "A church that does not take scripture seriously is no longer a church of Jesus Christ." Let us make every effort that no one could say this about our denomination. Luke 11:28 states, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." May God have mercy on us all."

(HA) A participant stated social and cross cultural issues must also be considered.

(C, A) Pastor Mindy Ehrke, Salem, Mount Vernon, Storla and Trinity, Letcher, stated the language about economics is not needed. The statement denounces the selling of sex and marketing of children and we as a church need to take a stand against the marketing of sex as a commodity.

(A) A pastor from Mitchell spoke to the person who feels alienated from the ELCA. He is proud to be member of the ELCA. The greatest gift from Luther is the focus on God's grace and unconditional love for all people. This statement uplifts all who struggle with their sexuality. By talking about this we honor God's teaching and our neighbors who may be different.

## **General Comments**

(HA, I) Pastor David Baer, Immanuel, Whitewood, stated concern there are no footnotes referencing any actions of the predecessor church bodies or the 1996 statement on sexuality. This document does not reference the 10 Commandments. The 1996 statement talks about how all commandments are God's law which helps us understand what God wants for us. Those documents were much easier to read. This document is very overwhelming. It is too much. His plea is to make this document clearer and much easier to understand.

(Pastor Baer requested the Lutheran CORE Response to Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality be included with the record of the hearing. See Attachment A)

(I) Pastor Jeff Sorenson, Sioux Falls, member of Church Council, stated he has already responded to the draft statement. He agrees with lines 1117-1118 on page 36 -- this church does not have consensus....we are agreed to be disagreed. This is a far cry from where this church has been in the past where we said we all have to agree. This document doesn't say what we don't have consensus about. It would be very helpful for the document to detail exactly what it is we do not agree about. Pastor Sorenson stated he thinks we don't agree whether homosexual behavior is sinful or not. Our stand on this statement then influences the rest of the discussion and actions – morality or justice. It would be very helpful to state at the heart what it is we disagree about.

(MC) Mary Beth Anderson, TEEM candidate, Timber Lake, stated someone very clever and subtle, skilled with words has written this. It reminds her of the Genesis story of the serpent asking the woman, "Did God really say..." We need to remember Luther taught not only grace alone and faith alone but also the word alone.

(MC) Pastor Karen Soli, Messiah New Hope, Sioux Falls, affirmed Pastor Sorenson's statement. The statement we agree to disagree is very important but it should be more defined. She does not describe our differences as whether being homosexual is sinful or not, but more to do with seeing homosexual as differently abled. We view many as differently abled. The point is there are some folks who arrive in different packages than what we label "normal". We as the church need to learn how to minister to and with them.

(MC) Evelyn Johnson, Community Lutheran, Hill City, stated a crucial question is whether we believe people were created homosexual. If so, then it would be cruel to deny them homosexual rights. This is a major question. We know scripture has been used out of fear and misused to hammer people for a lot of things. God's word says it is an abomination for a man to lay with a man. It grieves her that we don't seem to be willing to look at the fact there are many ministries that do not abuse scripture, but minister to people who are caught in a homosexual lifestyle. In working with people who want out of the lifestyle, many have been abused, have not been affirmed in their sexuality, or do not have good gender role models. Countless numbers of ministries are available that pray with people, bringing out memories of life and people are healed. She does not understand why the ELCA seems to be adamant about not looking into these ministries.

(A) Joy Smolnisky, Our Savior's, Sioux Falls, affirmed the statement. She believes it is a readable document. It assisted her to carry on a helpful conversation with her family and teenaged son.

(HA) Pastor Craig Werling, American Lutheran, Milbank, referenced lines 1422-1430 on page 46. Theologic foundations are good but the statement needs to be based on a Biblical foundation. We do not have the luxury to say we agree to disagree. We are called to wrestle with this issue. We can not agree to disagree -- Jesus said a house divided against itself will not stand. If we do not agree the church will not stand.

(MC) Linda Kennedy, Trinity, Madison, referenced 1 Corinthians 6:9 and stated we don't give the Holy Spirit any credit for being able to cleanse anyone from these sins. We all sin. She struggles with this and is unsure of the question. Children do not see this as a black and white issue. It's a very gray area. She is very concerned.

(A) Doug Luebke, Our Savior's, Corsica, stated his general impression is the statement is good. We have to accept the fact part of the church believes homosexuality is chosen and part believes it is genetic. He agrees with Pastor Sorenson that we need to agree to disagree.

(A) Pastor Tanya Rist, Zion, Aberdeen, stated her congregation made the commitment to study the statement during adult forums. They were able to hear all sides of the issue, especially those related to homosexuality, in a respectful manner. There is a wide range of opinions. It is a good statement in many ways, affirming marriage and commitment to family, taking a stand against pornography and sexual exploitation of any kind. She stated we need to remember these positives.

(MC) Susan Miles, Christ the King, Yankton, referenced lines 1393-1399 on page 46. Our goal should be for all to feel safe to state their opinions in our congregations.

(MC) Russel Graham, Emmanuel, Bereford, stated there are many references to the authority of scripture. He hopes the writers of this document take seriously what they are saying. Jesus said he who loves me keeps my commandments. Mr. Graham hopes and prays the final authority in these decisions is the scripture

(MC, I) Jack Mortenson, Trinity, Mitchell, affirmed the document. Understanding the mind of God is not easy. Understanding scripture is not easy either. He has faith he'll learn more. This document goes a long way in helping him understand new things. It is about much more than just homosexuality. Discussion of this document will help us to better understand scripture. As he has done this study, he has moved closer toward being more merciful to others as stated in lines 210-216 on page 8. This is a terribly academic document. He hopes the next version can be crafted to be easier to read and understand.

(MC) Joyce Hendrickson, Trinity, Vermillion, stated she agrees with the previous speaker who shares her feelings about the tone and presentation of facts and our beliefs in this statement. We should give broad acceptance in love, understanding and compassion as we face many issues. She asked a question of congregations – how many homosexuals are worshipping with you on Sunday mornings? How well are they received in our congregations?

(A, MC) Linda Molitor, Rejoice!, Sioux Falls, complimented the authors on including statements about abuse and pornography and such issues in our society. These issues have a big effect. Regarding the discussion of homosexuality – she did not find the document helpful. She doesn't know how many of those people really have a natural inclination and how many are struggling with the effects of being abused.

(MC) Pastor Dennis Fonkert, Northern Oahe, Glenham, stated what gives him hope are the words of a song, "one day every tongue will confess you are God, one day every knee will bow". We are all sinners in need of grace.

(A, I) Pastor Paul Rhode, Augustana College, expressed appreciation for the document as a whole. One of the things for which he is most grateful in our church is our willingness to address complex issues and mysteries and allow them to remain complex. There are few things more complex than sexuality. We know the mind of God is mysterious. One thing to improve in the statement is to focus on the Bible. We as Lutherans believe the word of God has power to raise us up, to give unity to the divided. He prefers the statement would point to the Biblical power pulling together and uniting that which is considered to be opposite -- Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free.

(MC) A member of Willow Creek, Elk Point, stated in his eyes we are defining ourselves and our church. We have been talking about the same thing for many years. It is dragging on. This has actually been going on for centuries, even in the Old Testament. We must be very careful of idolatry. We shouldn't try to define God or God's mind. He prays God fashions us and not us God.

(A) Pastor Erma Wolf, Brandon Lutheran, Brandon, thanked the task force for the section on protecting children and youth on pages 24-27. This section raises issues and concerns we need to hear. This section should be strengthened in its condemnation of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. She is appalled that society has placed responsibility for knowing safe touch on children rather than adults and society taking actions to protect children.

(MC) Adane Diers, Our Savior's, Hermosa, stated she moved to South Dakota from California seven years ago. The California Supreme Court just passed laws allowing same sex marriage. She has known many gays. Our church welcomes these people. She feels a sense of urgency about this discussion. We need to deal with it now. The Bible's stand hasn't changed on homosexuality.

(A, I) Alex Jensen, First, Sioux Falls, stated the document is very well written and thanked the task force. However, it is very academic. The document should be written so the majority of people in the US can read and understand it. Forty-six pages is too long. It is very difficult to read.

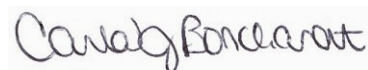
(MC) Pastor Jeff Otterman, St. James, Belle Fourche, stated less is more. We should pray for love for self, family, friends, enemies and writers.

(HA) Doris Whiteshock, Concordia, stated we spend much time discussing homosexuality, but don't address people who are living together outside of marriage.

(C) A youth, South Canyon, Rapid City, stated the Bible is clear this is a sin. He disagrees with the statement on line 1292 on page 42.

Rev. Engh thanked the Assembly for their respectful responses to the draft social statement.

Respectfully submitted,



Carla Borchardt  
Recorder

## Attachment A (submitted by Pastor David Baer)

### Lutheran CORE Response to Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

*Lutheran CORE offers this 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. We encourage all ELCA members to submit responses to the "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality" by the November 1, 2008, deadline.*

*<http://www.lutherancore.org>. This response highlights some of the formal responses to "Draft Statement on Human Sexuality" by ELCA pastors and scholars in a straightforward way to make it accessible to all ELCA members. Links to the more detailed reviews of the draft are available online at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).*

#### **Affirmations of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*:**

- Marriage is affirmed as a covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman.
- Marriage is affirmed as the most appropriate place for physical intimacy.
- The important role of the family is affirmed.
- Analysis of dominating influence of advertising and the media in our culture.
- Analysis of our current sexualized society and its many victims.
- Call for pastoral care and compassion for all people.
- Concern for cohabitation, promiscuity, and premarital sex.
- Spirit of civility and moderation in draft's approach to human sexuality.

#### **Suggestions for improvement of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*:**

- Affirm human sexuality as a part of God's created order for the world.
- Affirm marriage as God's intention for humanity "from the beginning of creation" (Mark 10:6-9, Genesis 2:24).
- Affirm marriage as the touchstone around which Christian sexual ethics are elaborated.
- Affirm procreation as one of the chief purposes of marriage.
- Affirm the role of the Ten Commandments in sexual ethics, especially the Sixth Commandment (See 1996 ELCA Message, "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions" for an example of this).
- Affirm the value of the traditional family while also recognizing other family structures.
- Affirm that all are sinners who are justified by grace through faith. But also recognize that God justifies sinners rather than justifying sins.

- Allow Scripture to function as *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.
- Allow Scripture to function as *norm* of the statement's teaching on sexuality by clearly affirming biblical norms for sexuality and sexual behavior.
- Consider the role of ELCA social statements to provide a framework for ethical decision making by ELCA members. Write in a way that most church members can understand and apply to their lives.
- Draw content more directly from Scripture — both Old Testament and New Testament.
- Draw content more directly from traditional Christian interpretation of Scripture and the Christian moral tradition.
- Draw content more directly from the ELCA Church Council's 1996 message, "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions."
- Draw content more directly from the social statements of The American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America (the ELCA's predecessor churches).
- Maintain a consistent definition of marriage throughout the draft.
- Maintain the relationship of the two great commandments from Jesus: love for God and love for neighbor (Mark 12:29-31). The command to love God first and entirely makes it clear that love for others is more than affirming all of their behaviors.
- Note the difference between forgiveness and acceptance. God forgives sinners and accepts them. God's acceptance of sinners does not mean that God accepts sins.
- Provide a clearer application of the first use of the Law — how God orders the world.
- Recognize Scriptural prohibitions of homosexual behavior in both Old Testament and New Testament.
- Recognize that Jesus' teaching on sexuality includes affirming woman and man as created in the image of God, upholding marriage, and the law of God he inherited from Jewish tradition, which gives the basic form and content to the sexual ethics he teaches and sometimes sharpens.
- Recognize the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly decision to "continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops."

**Concerns about *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*:**

- The most common concern raised by pastors and scholars is that the draft confuses the role of Law and Gospel in addressing human sexuality. The Lutheran tradition places sexuality within the doctrines of creation and the Law. God uses the Law to order the world and to reveal our sinfulness. 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. Christ's birth, death and resurrection are intimately connected with providing salvation and not with sexual morality.

- Pastoral Care in the Lutheran tradition is understood to be a personal address that is based on God's Word of both Law and Gospel. The draft seems to view pastoral care as merely affirmation and support.
- The use of "trust" as the central ethical principle for human relations in marriage and family life is confusing. Love would be a better Christian principle. Trust is a more passive quality in which one person allows his or her being to be dependent on the trustworthiness of another. Love is a more active principle that moves outward toward the other.
- The use of the category of trust in social relationships and institutions is confusing.
- The draft seems confused and disjointed. It is not always easy to discern how one theme leads to another.
- The draft lacks internal consistency.
- The draft seems to intentionally distance us from our biblical heritage — especially from the Old Testament.