

Resolution Affirming Marriage South Dakota Synod (3C)

WHEREAS, the 2008 South Dakota Synod Assembly asked the South Dakota Synod Council “to submit responses regarding sexuality to the ELCA Church Council regarding the Task Force’s final draft of a proposed ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality and regarding its recommendations on whether to change ELCA policy to permit persons in same-sex sexual relationships to serve as pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA prior to the ELCA Church Council’s March 2009 meeting and to make the responses available to members of the congregations of the South Dakota Synod (for example, by posting the responses to the synod web site and by including them in the ‘Synod Scene’);” and

WHEREAS, the South Dakota Synod Assembly has adopted several resolutions in recent years expressing the will of this synod on matters of sexuality including:

- 2008 - Participation in Process Toward ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality (Resolution 5);
- 2007 - Honoring the ELCA Study Process for a Social Statement on Human Sexuality (Resolution 6);
- 2005 - Amending & Opposing Church Council Recommendations (Resolution 13);
- 2005 - Resolution of Thanksgiving and Encouragement for the ELCA’s Study on Human Sexuality (Resolution 4);
- 2004 - ALC Social Statement on Human Sexuality (Resolution 8);
- 2004 - Congregational Ratification of Any Measures Passed at ELCA Churchwide Assemblies Allowing the Blessing of “Same-Sex” Unions and/or Rostering Non-celibate Gay and Lesbian Persons (Resolution 7);
- 2004 - Response to ELCA Sexuality Studies (Resolution 9);
- 2003 - On Affirming Traditional Marriage Conventions and Family Structures (Resolution 10);
- 2002 - Final Ratification of Changes Regarding the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions and/or Regarding Ordination of Non-celibate Gay and Lesbian Persons to be considered by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Resolution 14A);
- 2001 - Resolution on Human Sexuality (Resolution 13); and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Confessions state: “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone” (*Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule & Norm); and

WHEREAS, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 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 provision 2.03.); and

WHEREAS, Jesus taught that “from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate;” (Mark 10:6–9; Jesus is quoting Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24); and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Confessions, in Martin Luther’s Large Catechism, teach regarding marriage and the Sixth Commandment: “You should carefully note, first, how highly God honors and praises this walk of life, endorsing and protecting it by his commandment. He endorsed it above in the Fourth Commandment, ‘You shall honor father and mother.’ But here, as I said, he has secured and protected it. For the following reasons he also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it as a divine and blessed walk of life. He has established it before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God. God has therefore blessed this walk of life most richly, above all others, and, in addition, has supplied and endowed it with everything in the world in order that this walk of life might be richly provided for. Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God’s serious concern” (*Book of Concord*, The Large Catechism, Sixth Commandment); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America currently teaches that “Marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman” (“Sexuality: Some Common Convictions: A Message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” 1996); and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Church in America, one of the predecessor churches of the ELCA, taught that “Christian faith affirms marriage as a covenant of fidelity—a dynamic, lifelong commitment of one man and one woman in a personal and sexual union” and that “Marriage is ordained by God as a structure of the created order” (“Sex, Marriage, and Family: A Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America,” 1970); and

WHEREAS, The American Lutheran Church, one of the predecessor churches of the ELCA, taught that “Scripture sets the standard of a lifelong monogamous marriage of one man and one woman” (“Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior: A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church,” 1980) and that “Marriage is a structure of human life built into the creation by the Creator. It builds upon our creation as male and female (Gen. 1:27). Sexual differences are of God’s good design, intended to bring joy and enrichment to human life as well as to provide for procreation. The essence of marriage is that in the act and relationships of marriage two persons become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). In this complementary nature of the two sexes as God created them lies the basis for marriage and each new family” (“Teachings and Practice on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church,” 1982); and

WHEREAS, the 2008 draft social statement on human sexuality taught that “Marriage is a structure of mutual promises between a man and woman blessed by God (Mark 10:7-9) and authorized in a legal arrangement required by the state”; and

WHEREAS, some members of the ELCA are asking the ELCA to change the definition of marriage or merely to acknowledge that “marriage has historically been understood as” between a man and a woman;¹

WHEREAS, the 2009 proposed ELCA Social Statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” removed language from the first draft that defined marriage as between a man and woman and now merely acknowledges that “the historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman” and notes that 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” (“Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” pages 15-16); and

WHEREAS, ELCA pastors promise “to preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church” when they are ordained and installed (Rite for Installation of a Pastor, *LBW Occasional Services*, page 225); and

WHEREAS, the Church Council will meet March 27–30 and has the opportunity to amend the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality before recommending the text that will be considered by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the South Dakota Synod Council affirm this synod’s commitment to marriage as a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman in faithfulness to Scripture and in keeping with the ELCA Message “Sexuality: Some Common Convictions” and predecessor church social statements; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the South Dakota Synod Council ask the Church Council to affirm marriage as a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman and to recommend no statements in the proposed ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality or in ELCA standards for pastors and other rostered leaders that could be interpreted as rejecting Christian teaching on marriage; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the South Dakota Synod Council specifically ask the Church Council to make the following changes to the proposed social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” before recommending it to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly:

1. Add the words “between one man and one woman” to lines 502-503, page 14, so that the first sentence reads: “This church understands marriage as a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope between one man and one woman authorized legally by the state and blessed by God.”
2. Move lines 588-594, page 16, to line 671, page 18, in the section on “Lifelong monogamous same gender-relationships.”

¹ Lutherans Concerned/North America, “Response to the ELCA Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality,” http://www.lcna.org/lcna_downloads/lcna_draft_social_statement_response.pdf. This document states that changes in teaching on marriage are “the most important changes to be made in the Draft Social Statement.”