

A Pastoral Statement of
Conviction and Concern

Presented at the Conference on Christian Sexuality
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Ruskin Heights Lutheran Church
Kansas City, Missouri
October 24-26, 2002

To: The Rev. Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
The ELCA Conference of Bishops, the Rev. Bishop Donald McCoid, chair; the Church Council of the ELCA;
the ELCA Task Force on Human Sexuality, Dr. James Childs, director; and the Congregations of the ELCA

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is in the midst of studies on human sexuality. We wish to be a part of this process and to be active participants in the conversation. We do so in reliance on the Spirit's power to keep the church faithful to its Biblical and confessional heritage. We also do so with the intention to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

We offer the following statement as a way of summarizing our position on human sexuality and as our way of affirming what the church has taught and confessed on these issues since apostolic times.

1. The Bible and the Christian Tradition, including the Lutheran Confessions, see sexuality as integrally related to the doctrine of marriage. Marriage, an institution ordained by God, is the life-long union of one man and one woman for the creation of human life and for their mutual love and care. Sexual intercourse is not a fundamental private right or psychological necessity, but a gift of God. Its purpose is to serve as a means of uniting husband and wife and continuing God's life-creating work. The confessions teach that we are to "live chastely in thought, word, and deed in (our) particular situation" (Large Catechism 394:219, Tappert trans.). Sexual intercourse is part of the vocation of marriage and is misused in any other context.
2. The Gospel frees us from the curse of the Law, that is, the judgment that falls on us because we are sinners. It does not free us from the righteous life that the Law summarizes. "You, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). The freedom of the Gospel does not make the forbidden permissible; rather, that freedom encourages and enables us to embrace joyfully a life of faithful service and holy living. In Christ we are given the grace, by the Holy Spirit, to "know how to control (our) own body in holiness and honor" (1 Thessalonians 4:4).
3. We view any change in the church's doctrine of marriage as a grave error. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is currently studying whether the church may bless homosexual relationships, and whether the church may ordain sexually active homosexuals to the office of the ministry. Such proposed changes in Christian doctrine distort the Biblical record, appeal to questionable scientific theories, suppress inconvenient data, and rely overwhelmingly on individual experience which has been conditioned by contemporary culture and values. We are troubled by the process that has been used in recent studies on human sexuality within the ELCA. The conversations on this issue thus far have largely focused on personal experience and the sharing of anecdotes, rather than on the teaching of Holy Scripture and the theological and confessional witness of the church. We call the church to recognize that personal experience is not a reliable interpretive key to the Word of God.
4. Three strategies have been proposed by those who wish to change the present policy. One is "ordination to place," in which a non-celibate homosexual is ordained exclusively to serve one congregation. A second is

“synodical option,” which permits synods to set their own standards in this matter. A third strategy might be termed “conscientious pluralism,” in which traditional and revisionist perspectives on these matters are allowed to coexist in the church. Any of these proposals would destroy the unity of the ELCA and of its ordained ministry.

5. We understand the genuine suffering and challenge that our homosexual brothers and sisters face. We repudiate all forms of prejudice and hatred, but we believe that Christian love requires the clear proclamation of God’s truth which alone can free and reconcile us. Sensitive pastoral care for homosexual persons will include compassion, encouragement and the same call to repentance and chastity that God continually places before us all.

Because we love the whole church, many of us are facing a potential crisis of conscience regarding the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We earnestly desire to remain actively engaged in the life and mission of our church, but we observe that the ELCA is becoming schismatic and sectarian. We therefore pray that our church's reflection on human sexuality be determined by an obedient listening to the Word of God and by a faithful witness to that Word.

To record your signature, mail to Ruskin Heights Lutheran Church, 10801 Ruskin Way, Kansas City, Missouri 64134 (or e-mail: rhlc@rhlc.org).

Your Name

Title

Address

Telephone and E-mail

Congregational/Congregational Council endorsements are also sought.

Include:

Name of congregation

Address

Names of president and secretary attesting endorsement

Initial Deadline: February 15, 2003