

Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies

Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality

I. Introduction and Background

The occasion for this report and recommendations

The seventh Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), meeting in August 2001, directed this church: 1) to study homosexuality with reference to two issues—the blessing of same-sex unions¹ and the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of people in committed, same-sex unions;² and 2) to develop a social statement on human sexuality.³

The ELCA Church Council in November 2001 and April 2002 bundled the two resolutions into one mandate for study and recommendations and gave responsibility for this work to the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality.

In 2005 the task force prepared its first report for consideration by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. That report recommended restraint from discipline regarding the question of rostering⁴ people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. The assembly received but declined to approve an alternate recommendation from the Church Council for rostering people in such relationships. Two years later the 2007 Churchwide Assembly again gave a mandate on this matter to the task force, asking them “specifically to address and make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church.” (CA07.06.27)

Background of ministry policy related to people oriented to the same gender

For much of its life, the ELCA has engaged in discernment about whether to approve Lutherans in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships for the rosters of this church for service as ordained ministers, associates in ministry, deaconesses, or diaconal ministers.

Two of the ELCA’s predecessor church bodies, The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America, produced social statements that address, in part, the subject of homosexuality. In 1980, The American Lutheran Church described homosexual behavior as “contrary to God’s intent” and noted the then-current scientific consensus. The statement went on to say, “While we see no scriptural rationale for revising the church’s traditional teaching that homosexual erotic behavior violates God’s intent, we nonetheless remain open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights.”⁵ In 1975, the Lutheran Church in America stated, “Scientific research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes of homosexuality. Nevertheless, homosexuality is viewed biblically as a departure from the heterosexual structure of God’s creation.”⁶

In accordance with the historic church understanding reflected in these two social statements, the ELCA developed the document “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” (adopted by the Church Council in

¹ See Note 1, page 19.

² See Note 2, page 19.

³ See Note 3 page 20.

⁴ Roster(s) refers to people approved to serve as ordained ministers, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and associates in ministry for the ELCA. Rostering refers to the structures and processes by which people are approved for the roster(s).

⁵ *Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior*, (The American Lutheran Church, 1980), 8.

⁶ *Sex, Marriage, and Family* (The Lutheran Church in America, 1975), 4.

40 1989; revised in 1993), which precluded “practicing homosexuals” from the rosters of this church. A
41 similar prohibition was included subsequently in a second document approved by the Church Council,
42 “Vision and Expectations,” (adopted by the Church Council in 1990) which outlined a broad range of
43 expectations this church holds for ordained clergy. This same prohibition also was included subsequently
44 in the “Vision and Expectations” for rostered lay people.
45

46 The present issue is not whether gay and lesbian people can serve as ordained ministers and rostered lay
47 leaders in the ELCA. They can and do, as they did in the predecessor churches. The existing prohibitions
48 are not about same-gender orientation as such. What was and is prohibited is rostered service by any
49 person who engages in same-gender sexual intimacy. For heterosexual people, the documents require that
50 sexual intimacy be within the context of marriage. The expectations described in the two “Vision and
51 Expectations” documents and in “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” provide no parallel context
52 for people who are in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
53

54 **Lack of consensus in this church on the question of rostering**

55 As a result of its work beginning in 2002, the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality has been
56 keenly aware of the lack of consensus concerning the rostering of people in lifelong, monogamous, same-
57 gender relationships as ordained ministers, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and associates in ministry.
58 This lack of consensus also is present within the task force itself.
59

60 In its report to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the task force wrote: “The issue concerning the
61 ordination, consecration, and commissioning of people in same-sex committed relationships is one that
62 has caused the greatest division among members of the task force. We experienced within our group the
63 painful tension caused when Christians, in good conscience, differ in their interpretations of Scripture
64 with regard to this issue. In our discussions, . . . strong convictions were voiced repeatedly as we struggled
65 to formulate a recommendation that would find support among the majority of the task force members.”⁷
66

67 Over these years of study and conversation, the task force has come to acknowledge that there is “neither
68 a consensus—a general agreement—nor any emerging consensus on these practices and standards”⁸ either
69 within the ELCA or within other faith communities in North America.
70

71 Now, in 2009, this conclusion of the task force has not changed. The task force continues to recognize
72 that the long-held consensus in church and society regarding same-gender sexual intimacy has broken
73 down.⁹ The task force finds this to be true for the ELCA, for other faith communities in North America,
74 and for North American society. The majority of task force members do not expect recovery of the former
75 consensus. Neither does the task force expect a new consensus to emerge in the near future.
76

77 *Areas of disagreement*

78 Therefore, the task force believes this church must seek a common way to live and serve in the midst of
79 disagreements. The areas of disagreement include: 1) the understanding of the nature of sin, the means of
80 determining what behavior is sinful, and the ways in which this church can best address the problem of
81 sin; 2) the interpretation of the Bible, including not only the contemporary meaning of particular
82 passages, but also how the Bible guides our lives; 3) the determination of what will be best for people

⁷ “Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality” (ELCA, 2005) 6–7.

⁸ Ibid, 10.

⁹ We define consensus to be present when most people share assumptions and conclusions.

83 who have a definite orientation toward others of the same gender; 4) whether and how social and
84 biological sciences inform us in matters of moral judgment; 5) the best way to serve the mission of God
85 through this church; and 6) the level of disagreement the ELCA can bear.

86
87 In its years of listening to this church, the task force has heard and considered carefully a variety of
88 arguments from continuing the present policy prohibiting the rostering of people in lifelong,
89 monogamous, same-gender relationships to changing this policy. The arguments are complex and
90 nuanced, and no brief summary can do full justice to thoughtful and passionately held convictions of
91 people in this church (see *Journey Together Faithfully 2: The Church and Homosexuality*). Nevertheless,
92 because the task force has found that mutual respect has been enhanced by careful efforts to understand
93 and articulate the grounds on which people hold their convictions, a brief summary follows.

94
95 *Continuing the current policy of prohibition regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships*
96 Advocates for continuing the current policy, which requires all people of same-gender orientation who are
97 or who wish to be approved for the rosters of this church to remain celibate, endorse this church's long-
98 standing welcome to its same-gender-oriented members and seekers. Those who favor the present ELCA
99 policy:

- 100 • Affirm Lutheran confessional doctrines, including the goodness and fallenness of all creation,
101 justification by grace through faith, and the Spirit's sanctifying work.
- 102 • Have studied the literary, historical, and theological context of the seven biblical texts that refer
103 directly to same-gender sexual activity¹⁰ and have given attention to other biblical texts and themes,
104 such as those relating to marriage, creation, and law.
- 105 • Do not reject scientific or cultural insights; however, they believe that the conflict among scientific
106 opinions does not provide sufficient basis for making changes to teachings and practices whose
107 wisdom long has been accepted.
- 108 • Express concern about unhealthy and unfaithful life styles among gay and lesbian people, but also
109 recognize examples of gay and lesbian people seeking to lead lives that serve God and the neighbor.
- 110 • Lament that many gay and lesbian Christians have experienced this church's positions and policy as
111 painful personal rejection and seek to have a church where all sinners truly experience God's
112 forgiveness.
- 113 • Recognize that many, though not all, church bodies in this country and around the world have
114 declined to change policies similar to the present ELCA policy.
- 115 • Express concern about loss of members and congregations if the policies are changed.

116
117 On the basis of their attention to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, to human experience, and to this
118 church's mission, these Lutherans are convinced any changes to the ELCA's present policy prohibiting
119 people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships from serving as leaders of public ministry
120 would neither be faithful to God's revelation nor serve the proclamation of the Word.

121
122 For nearly all who support the existing policy, Scripture is the decisive concern. They believe that change
123 would subordinate the Word of God to the vagaries of cultural customs and human opinion. The specific
124 features of Scripture that are considered decisive vary somewhat. For some, the conclusion rests primarily

¹⁰ The texts normally cited are Genesis 19:1–11; Judges 19:16–30; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:26–27; 1
Corinthians 6:9–11; Timothy 1:9–10. For more information, “Background Essay on Biblical Texts for *Journey
Together Faithfully Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality*.” (Chicago: ELCA, 2003). The task force
commissioned an essay by biblical scholars Walter F. Taylor Jr. and Arland Hultgren regarding these texts.

125 on the impact of the seven texts which they believe express the will of God for human behavior. They
126 believe these texts are binding on Christians today in much the same way as they were on their original
127 audiences. Others focus more on the early chapters of Genesis, recognizing that natural law reasoning is a
128 part of Lutheran heritage. In those chapters they see a heterosexual intention in creation that shapes their
129 interpretation of human sexuality and the institutions of marriage and family. Whether focusing on the
130 biblical prohibitions or the heterosexual order of creation, these Lutherans read these texts in light of the
131 Gospel, in the context of larger themes, and with compassion for individuals and communities, but always
132 with the conviction that where the Word of God is clear and unified, it provides the only relevant measure
133 of godly and acceptable behavior. Where conduct violates the law of God, they believe that sinners must
134 be called to contrition and repentance since love of neighbor requires that the law be affirmed and
135 enforced. To allow the neighbor to remain in sin, and to endorse sin as acceptable, is to allow that
136 neighbor to persist in grave danger of unrepentant sin and represents a betrayal of Christian responsibility
137 to the neighbor. In addition, and as a direct consequence of this understanding of sin, they favor
138 continuing the present policy because of their sense of what will best serve the proclamation of Christ to
139 the world. They are concerned deeply about the unpredictable consequences any official changes could
140 have on relations with partner churches in the Lutheran World Federation, with The Lutheran Church–
141 Missouri Synod, and with churches ecumenically throughout the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

142
143 Advocates for continuing the present policy assert their positions with varying degrees of certainty. Some
144 are absolutely convinced. Others, taking all things into account, conclude that in a difficult and complex
145 situation, continuing present policies appears to be the most faithful course for this church.

146
147 *Changing the current policy of prohibition regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships*
148 The advocates for various degrees of change in ELCA policy also endorse this church's historic welcome
149 to its same-gender-oriented members, though they consider this welcome to be, at this time, imperfect.

150 Those who support changing ELCA policy:

- 151 • Affirm the same biblical and confessional doctrines as the advocates for present policies, including
152 the goodness and fallenness of all creation, justification by grace through faith, and the Spirit's
153 sanctifying work.
- 154 • Base their conclusions on the same range of tradition and information affirmed by those who support
155 the present policy, although they weigh and interpret it somewhat differently.
- 156 • Are aware of decades of scientific deliberation in the medical and human sciences. They note
157 significant changes in how homosexuality is understood.
- 158 • Note the public recognition of the gifts that same-gender-oriented people have brought to the world.
- 159 • Recognize that although sin may lead to unhealthy and unfaithful conduct among all people, there are
160 same-gender-oriented individuals and couples whose lives and faithfulness are morally commendable
161 and who seek to live as faithful Christians in accord with the will of God.
- 162 • Recognize that other churches, including in this country and in the Lutheran World Federation and
163 ecumenically are struggling with these same questions.

164
165 On the basis of their attention to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, to human experience, and to this
166 church's mission, these Lutherans are convinced that it is not only appropriate, but also imperative, to
167 welcome rostered service by people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

168
169 Advocates for change affirm the strong witness of the same seven biblical texts that refer to same-gender
170 sexual conduct in their literary, historical, and theological contexts. They also understand, however, that
171 the witness of these texts is to condemn abusive or coercive sexual behavior, or sexual behavior that
172 expresses a rejection of God's sovereignty. In interpreting the seven texts, advocates for change conclude

173 that these texts oppose unhealthy and unfaithful conduct by people oriented to the same gender. They
174 believe the texts do not in fact address the contemporary situation of people seeking to live in lifelong,
175 monogamous, same-gender relationships marked by the same levels of mutuality, love, and trust as are
176 found in heterosexual marriages. They believe these texts and others convey neither a rejection of those
177 Christians whose orientation is to people of the same gender nor a rejection of lifelong, monogamous,
178 same-gender relationships that bless the world.

179
180 Advocates for change in policy note that all human sexuality reveals the power of sin and that the work of
181 the church in relation to the sexuality of all people is to condemn harmful behaviors, heal broken lives,
182 and celebrate sexual conduct that contributes to durable, stable, mature, and life-giving relationships.
183 They recognize the value of having social structures that provide community support and public
184 accountability for relationships.

185
186 Advocates for change note that the gifts of the Spirit can be seen among us, not only in the lives of
187 heterosexual Christians, but also in those who are lesbian or gay, including same-gender couples who are
188 leading godly and commendable lives within the framework of lifelong, monogamous, same-gender
189 relationships. Further, they note that partnered gay and lesbian members of this church experience God's
190 call to rostered ministry, demonstrate gifts for such ministries, and often have been affirmed in those calls
191 and gifts by ELCA individuals, congregations, and synodical candidacy committees.

192
193 Some advocates for change place primary emphasis on the biblical message that each Christian is called
194 to loving service in all circumstances of her or his life. They note that the reformers argued against the
195 requirement of celibacy among clergy and that the Apostle Paul, though he favored singleness for
196 Christians, nevertheless gave great weight to the human realities of longing and loneliness, writing, "It is
197 better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:9). Advocates for some level of change
198 say that the Christian community must help each individual discern in his or her own life what constitutes
199 sinful rebellion against God and what constitutes faithful obedience.

200
201 Many advocates for change express deep concern about the harm done to Christians when they and their
202 gifts are rejected by this church and the loss to this church's mission when these gifts are not used. They
203 find unacceptable the pain and rejection that some same-gender-oriented people have experienced from
204 the church and conclude that this church must return to the Scriptures to determine whether we have
205 heard God's Word in its fullness. They also are concerned about the damage inflicted on this church's
206 self-understanding and public witness when the church is perceived widely to be unable or unwilling to
207 take into account the contributions of secular forms of inquiry that have enriched our understanding of
208 human nature, human sexuality, social institutions, and human communities.

209
210 Advocates for change assert their positions with varying degrees of certainty. Some are absolutely
211 convinced. Others, taking all things into account, conclude that in a difficult and complex situation,
212 change appears to be the most faithful course for this church.

213
214 *Differing conclusions, much in common*

215 Thus, there are sharply differing conclusions among ELCA members. Nevertheless, the task force also
216 wishes to assert that significant areas of agreement exist among those who support the continuance of
217 present policies and those who advocate for change. All desire to live godly and self-giving lives in

218 gratitude for the gifts of God promised and disclosed in the Gospel.¹¹ All believe that we are called to
219 proclaim and serve God in the world. Members of this church hold different opinions as to what is
220 faithful, just, and wise in this matter of public ministry, but are committed to let the Bible and the
221 Lutheran Confessions guide them, to lead faithful lives and support others in leading faithful lives, and to
222 pray and work for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to be an effective instrument of God's
223 mission.

224
225 The task force recognizes the deep love that all hold for this church and the shared commitment to
226 remaining together in spite of differences on these matters. We take particular note of and thank God that
227 gay and lesbian members continue as part of this church despite this church's all-too-frequent failure to
228 live out its publicly declared welcome and their experience as both the objects and subjects of sharp
229 disagreements. We take particular note of and thank God that those who find even the consideration of
230 changing policy to be a betrayal of traditional Christian conviction continue to live and serve in the
231 church they love. Although the factors are many and the arguments are complex, this task force has
232 attempted to model Christian love and requests this whole church do the same.

233
234

235 **II. Description of the Task Force Recommendations**

236 In the face of these differing conclusions, all of which are represented on the task force itself, the task
237 force was unable to come to unanimous agreement. Although the recommendation that follows represents
238 the consensus of most of the task force, it does not have the support of all. It is therefore presented
239 humbly, with a sense of burden for the sisters and brothers in Christ—both on the task force and in the
240 wider church—who are bound by their consciences to disagree.

241
242 *The task force recommends a process that begins with the assembly declaring its intention about what it*
243 *wants to do.* The proposed process begins with decisions about *whether* this church wants to find a way to
244 recognize publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; and *whether* this
245 church wants to move in the direction of rostering people living in such relationships. *If so*, then the
246 process leads to considering *how* this could be accomplished. The resolutions begin by seeking agreement
247 on the principles before they address the practice.

248
249 *The recommendation thus consists of four resolutions, each of which takes a step in the decision-making*
250 *process.* The task force proposes to the assembly that the decisions be taken in four consecutive steps. If
251 the assembly agrees to the first, then the second, third, and fourth would be considered only if the
252 preceding one(s) had been approved.

253
254 **Step one** asks the assembly whether, in principle, it is committed to finding ways to allow congregations
255 and synods that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong,
256 monogamous, same-gender relationships.

257
258 The work of the task force focused on the question of rostering people living in lifelong, monogamous,
259 same-gender relationships. Although the fourth resolution addresses the relationships of people who are

¹¹ In 2005, as part of its biblical consideration in relation to homosexuality, the task force commissioned a background study on selected biblical texts related to homosexuality from two highly respected biblical scholars in the ELCA: Dr. Arland J. Hultgren and Dr. Walter F. Taylor Jr. In their essay they concluded, "The difference between interpreters should not be understood as a conflict between those who seek to be 'true to Scripture' and those who seek to 'twist the Bible' to their own liking. The disagreements are genuine."

260 or wish to be rostered, the task force believes that this question can be considered only if this church
261 offers the possibility of public accountability to lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. The
262 task force considers this a necessary prior step because this church expects that all its rostered leaders will
263 be held accountable in their relationships. Therefore, the task force asks the assembly to clarify its intent
264 on the general question of recognizing, supporting, and holding publicly accountable these relationships,
265 noting that approval of this first resolution would not imply commitment to a particular way of
266 accomplishing this.

267
268 **Step two** asks the assembly whether, in principle, it is committed to finding a way for people in such
269 publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of
270 this church.

271
272 This step is based on the assumption that, before being able to consider specific proposals for how to
273 accomplish such a change, this church must decide, in principle, whether or not it wants to move in this
274 direction. The approval of this second resolution would not, at this step, imply a commitment to a
275 particular way of accomplishing this.

276
277 **Step three** asks this church whether, in the future implementation of steps one and two (see above), it will
278 commit to doing so in such a way that all in this church bear the burdens of the other, love the neighbor,
279 and respect the bound conscience of any with whom they disagree.

280
281 This step recognizes that agreement in this church on this matter does not exist. Therefore, decisions
282 about policy that serve only the interests of one or another group will not be acceptable. If this church
283 intends to move toward change or to decline to change, this step commits it to doing so in ways that
284 respect the convictions and provide space for the faithful witness of all.

285
286 **Step four** then presents a proposal for how this church could move toward change in a way that respects
287 the bound conscience of all.

288
289 *Rationale for each of the four resolutions*

290
291 **Step One:** *The need for a decision about whether to find ways to allow congregations and synods*
292 *that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong,*
293 *monogamous, same-gender relationships as a necessary first step toward rostering.*
294

295 The assignment given to the task force by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly was: “specifically to address
296 and make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any policies that preclude
297 practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church.” In the course of its discussions, the task
298 force agreed that this church cannot responsibly consider any changes to its policies unless this church is
299 able and willing in some way to recognize lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

300
301 In its process of discernment the task force looked to the principles of the proposed social statement,
302 *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. This social statement grows out of the foundational theological
303 understanding that Lutherans read and understand the Bible in light of the incarnation, death, and
304 resurrection of Jesus Christ. This “good news” of the Gospel that we are freed from captivity to sin
305 (justification by grace through faith on account of Christ) allows us to respond to God’s mercy through
306 love for and service to the neighbor (our vocation in the world). It further affirms that, because God’s

307 promises are trustworthy, we are called in Christian freedom to be trustworthy in our relationships with
308 one another, and to build social institutions and practices that create trust.¹²
309

310 In considering trust in sexual relationships, the social statement identifies two conditions that most
311 effectively create the context for trust: public accountability and lifelong commitment. It states that
312 relationships between individuals are never solely for the sake of the individuals involved, but also for the
313 protection of the most vulnerable and to create the conditions for trust within society. Heterosexual
314 couples may commit themselves through marriage to a lifelong relationship that is honored, publicly
315 recognized, and upheld by their faith community. There are no similar processes within this church for the
316 lifelong, monogamous relationships of same-gender-oriented people to be similarly honored, upheld, and
317 publicly supported.
318

319 The task force is not prepared to recommend the development of an official liturgical rite or order of
320 public accountability because this church does not have biblical and theological consensus on this matter.
321 At the same time, most of the task force members believe that ways can be found within local
322 congregations to surround the commitments of such couples with prayer and, in so doing, provide public
323 affirmation and accountability within those communities. Indeed, the task force notes that this public
324 affirmation already is happening in many congregations. It also notes that many congregations would not
325 choose to recognize or support any same-gender relationship.
326

327 Without some provision for recognizing and supporting lifelong, monogamous, same-gender
328 relationships, the task force believes that same-gender-oriented people cannot be held publicly
329 accountable in the ways that are required of people holding the public offices of rostered ministry.
330

331 The majority of the task force therefore recommends that this assembly, as its first step, begin its
332 deliberations by clarifying its position on this question: **Should the ELCA commit itself to finding ways
333 to allow congregations and synods that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly
334 accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships?**
335

336 The task force believes that, only if this church is able to give an affirmative answer to this question is it
337 possible to move on to step two.
338

339 **Step Two:** *The need for a decision about whether to find a way for people in publicly accountable,
340 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this
341 church.*
342

343 The question about whether or not to approve people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships
344 for its rosters has been before this church for many years. Most recently, the 2005 Churchwide Assembly

¹² Proposed social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), II. 61–63.

On Trust: “Human beings learn about trust from God. When the Lutheran Confessions discuss faith in God, they understand it fundamentally as trust or absolute confidence in God. In faith nurtured by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament, we entrust our whole lives to God. We experience God’s unfailing trustworthiness in God’s relationship with us through the Gospel, and God’s deep mercy and compassion in response to our human frailty. In response, as forgiven and justified people, we seek to respond to God’s love for us through care for the neighbor, fostering trust in order that individuals and society might flourish.” The Latin version of the Augsburg Confession uses the word *fiducia* when it speaks of trust. [Proposed social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), II 446–452.]

345 received a full report and recommendations from this task force and the 2007 Churchwide Assembly
346 again called for a report and recommendations on the same topic.
347

348 Earlier in this report the task force presented a brief summary of the differing opinions in this matter and
349 the biblical and theological beliefs that inform them, noting that it previously published a much fuller
350 discussion in an essay by Walter Taylor Jr. and Arland Hultgren (see footnote 10). The task force believes
351 that consensus does not exist in this church with regard to the matter of sexual intimacy between same-
352 gender-oriented people. For this reason, consensus also does not exist regarding the question of whether
353 or not to approve for the rosters of this church people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender
354 relationships.
355

356 Given this situation, the task force believes that before this church can consider any proposal regarding
357 rostering, it must first, in principle, determine whether or not it wishes to move toward approving for its
358 rosters people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
359

360 The majority of the task force therefore recommends that this assembly, as its second step, respond to this
361 question: **Should this church commit itself to finding a way for people in publicly accountable,
362 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church?**
363

364 **Step Three:** *The need for a decision to be taken in the spirit of bearing one another's*
365 *burdens, serving the neighbor, and respecting the bound conscience of those*
366 *with whom we disagree.*
367

368 Like the church as a whole, the task force is not of one mind and consensus does not exist. All have
369 struggled to respect one another's opinions and have done so with an understanding that love for the
370 neighbor requires us to bear one another's burdens and to respect and find a way to live with the bound
371 consciences of those with whom we do not agree. We wish to hold up to the whole church the integrity,
372 struggle, and honesty with which all members of the task force have entered into this difficult and
373 conflicted conversation. We honor and hope that this church will honor the deep faith of all its members.
374

375 The task force believes that, before considering any concrete proposal to approve the rostering of people
376 in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, the assembly must first
377 consider whether it is willing to commit this church to taking such a step in the spirit of mutual support,
378 love, and community. Therefore the whole task force recommends that this assembly, as its third step,
379 respond to this question: **As it implements its decisions to find ways to roster people in publicly
380 accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, can this church commit to doing so
381 in ways that bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of
382 those with whom they disagree?**
383

384 The task force has concluded that the Lutheran understanding of the bound conscience is a critical
385 concept in discerning how to live with this church's lack of consensus. In its report to the 2005
386 Churchwide Assembly, the task force concluded that: "... our differences express deeply held and
387 conscience-bound positions..." and "When Christians disagree about an ethical issue of this magnitude,
388 one important category for determining the policy of the church may be the recognition that participants
389 in this debate are disagreeing not out of pride or selfish desires, but because their consciences are bound
390 to particular interpretations of Scripture and tradition." The careful way Luther approached moral
391 dilemmas (e.g., in *The Estate of Marriage* [Luther's Works 45: 17-49] and *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can*
392 *Be Saved* [Luther's Works 46: 93-137]) showed a genuine concern for the integrity of conscience. Indeed,

393 in his own defense at the Diet of Worms, he declared himself bound in conscience by the Word of God
394 and further stated, “It is neither safe nor right to go against conscience” (*Luther’s Works* 32: 112). In this
395 concern for conscience Luther reflected the same respect for conscience reflected in the Bible (Romans
396 14-15).¹³

397
398 The emphasis of “conscience-bound” is not on declaring oneself to be conscience-bound. Rather, we are
399 bound in love by the conscience of the other—that is, we recognize the conscience-bound nature of the
400 convictions of others in the community of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:28–29). For Lutherans, the reality that
401 people hold convictions from deep faith that may be in conflict with the deep faith convictions of others is
402 not merely a procedural or political difficulty. As sisters and brothers in Christ we bear one another’s
403 burdens. For one member to suffer because her or his conscience has been offended is for all of us to
404 suffer.

405
406 The task force understands the term “bound conscience” to describe the situation of those who hold a
407 particular position because they are convinced of it by particular understandings of Scripture and
408 tradition. For this church to move toward rostering Lutherans in same-gender relationships in a time of
409 lack of consensus requires this church to find ways to respect the bound consciences of one another—
410 even and especially when the other is conscience-bound to disagree with the action being taken.

411
412 The task force asks members of this church to join them in a commitment to honor conscience-bound
413 decisions. However, they recognize that such honoring may lead to some diversity of practice within this
414 church. The task force asks specifically for respect for those who are charged with decision-making—
415 candidacy committees, bishops, or members of congregations—regarding the approval; ordination,
416 consecration, or commissioning; or calling of a candidate to a particular setting. The task force recognizes
417 that some will be conscience-bound to disagree with any recommendation for change and others will be
418 conscience-bound to disagree with any recommendation to maintain present policy. Nevertheless, the task
419 force invites this church to continue and even deepen its ability to “concentrate on finding ways to live
420 together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements.” (CA05.05.17) Staying together will require us to
421 “bear one another’s burdens,” as the Apostle says, “and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”
422 (Galatians 6:2).

423
424 Our perspectives on social realities, in particular human sexuality, are not the basis of our unity or
425 disunity. Our Lutheran unity is centered on the promises of God, our common baptism, and our
426 fellowship in the sacrament of Holy Communion, expressed in our love for the Lutheran church,
427 theology, and tradition. We call on this church to model peace and reconciliation and a commitment to
428 continue together in worship and service to a world that desperately needs its united mission.

429
430 **Step Four:** *The task force recommendation to consider structured flexibility in decision-*
431 *making to allow, in appropriate situations, people in publicly accountable,*
432 *monogamous, lifelong, same-gender relationships to be approved for the rosters of*
433 *the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

434
435 This fourth step is different from the previous three in that it is not simply a commitment in principle, but
436 makes a specific recommendation for flexibility within existing structures and practices of this church to
437 allow for people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to be
438 approved for the rosters of the ELCA.

¹³ “2005 Pre-Assembly Report,” Section V, 17–18.

439
440 In discerning what to recommend concerning rostering, the task force realized that there are multiple
441 ways this church might respond to the present lack of consensus. The task force considered
442 recommending that there be no change from present policies, and it considered recommending changes
443 that would fully eliminate any reference to sexual orientation. The task force also considered a number of
444 other intermediate options. However, the majority of the task force concludes that, among all the options
445 available, it will best serve the mission of the ELCA to recommend that, within the existing structures and
446 practices of this church, some means for flexibility in decision-making be implemented so that
447 congregations and synods may choose whether or not to approve or call people in publicly accountable,
448 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve on ELCA rosters.

449
450 *Choosing from within a range of options*

451 Most, but not all, members of the task force believe that it is undesirable and unrealistic to continue with
452 existing policy in its present form. They feel this approach would fail to honor the conscience-bound lack
453 of consensus in this church. They also believe that continuing current policy does not serve the mission
454 and ministry of this church in instances where a member in a publicly accountable, lifelong,
455 monogamous, same-gender relationship is the person determined to be best suited for a particular call.
456 Many members of the task force also feel that it is unrealistic to continue the present policy because
457 parallel and conflicting practices have developed in response to the present prohibition.

458
459 Similarly, most on the task force believe that adopting a policy of unqualified change—that is, a policy
460 that does not consider publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships as a
461 relevant factor in the rostering process—also would not be a faithful response to the lack of consensus in
462 this church. As with the option of continuing the present policy, many believe it would be harmful to the
463 mission and ministry of this church to recommend an option that assumes the existence of a universal
464 consensus, which clearly does not exist. An option for unqualified change would suggest that some would
465 have to go against their conscience-bound positions to adhere. In this regard the task force believes that,
466 as this is a matter of God’s civil realm, “God’s left hand,” this church is free to live with a diversity of
467 opinions in this matter.¹⁴ The majority of the task force therefore concludes that, given both the lack of
468 consensus in church and society and the lack of legal or ecclesial structures corresponding to heterosexual
469 marriage, it is neither responsible nor practical to recommend unqualified change.

470
471 *Choosing structured flexibility of decision-making*

472 The majority of the task force believes that it is possible to devise guidelines and policies that would
473 allow, within ELCA structures, some flexibility in decision-making for the rostering of individuals who
474 are currently in or contemplate being¹⁵ in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender
475 relationship and to do it in a way that can be good for this church and its mission. Though no policy can
476 be fully in accord with this church’s diversity of convictions, the majority of the task force believes that
477 the conscience-bound lack of consensus will be respected most faithfully by providing for some level of
478 structured flexibility of decision-making.

479
480 This flexibility would make it possible—within existing practices, in appropriate settings, and through a
481 consistent process and standards—for those who already hold the responsibility for discernment and
482 decision-making to choose whether or not to approve people who are living in publicly accountable,

¹⁴ Proposed social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (ELCA 2009) lines 202 ff.

¹⁵ Here and at other points, it should be understood that dating relationships also would be considered as policies were amended.

483 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church. As is the
484 case with heterosexual marriages, the partnership or potential partnership of a same-gender-oriented
485 member would be a matter of public knowledge for those engaged in discernment about candidacy and
486 call.

487
488 To choose structured flexibility does not imply that same-gender-oriented people in publicly accountable,
489 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships would be able to serve everywhere in this church. The
490 existing discernment processes for approval and call already assume that synods, bishops, candidacy
491 committees, rostered leaders, and congregations will make decisions in keeping with their own
492 conscience and convictions. If structured flexibility were added to the process, this assumption would still
493 protect any congregation, candidacy committee, synod, or bishop from having to violate bound
494 conscience by approving, calling, commissioning, consecrating, or ordaining anyone in a publicly
495 accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship. Similarly, a structured flexibility process
496 would protect the decisions of a congregation, candidacy committee, synod, or bishop who concludes that
497 mission would be served best by approving or calling a particular candidate or rostered leader who is in a
498 publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.

499
500 The determination of where and when this flexibility would be exercised would depend upon the mission
501 and ministry needs of the relevant settings, as well as the conscience-bound positions of the individuals
502 and groups who, on behalf of this church, hold decision-making authority in those settings.

503
504 *Background note on ELCA candidacy and rostering policies*

505 This fourth part of the recommendation relies on the present structure and practices of the ELCA
506 candidacy and call process. Public ministry in this church is not a right to be claimed. Rather, public
507 ministries are vocations to be discerned mutually by individuals and this church. These vocations require
508 public accountability.

509
510 As an important part of this public accountability, this church puts in writing its understanding of Christ's
511 mission, its standards of faith and practice, and its expectations of its leaders. Some articulations, actions,
512 and lifestyles support the public ministry to which a person is called. Others are incompatible with
513 faithful public ministry in this church and bar entry into or continuance in that ministry.¹⁶ This church
514 holds its rostered leaders publicly accountable for their work and their lives.

515
516 The candidacy policies of this church call for a mutual discernment process, usually lasting several years,
517 that involves the individual candidate for public ministry, the faculty of an ELCA seminary, and the
518 elected members of the synodical candidacy committee. At the end of the process, the candidacy
519 committee makes the final decision whether or not to approve a person for call. Using the standards of
520 this church, the candidate and committee consider a wide variety of factors, including the candidate's
521 sense of calling, gifts, skills, manner of living, and theological understanding. There are extensive
522 guidelines to assist in this discernment, beginning with the Bible and Lutheran Confessions, which are the
523 norms of this church. At the conclusion of the process, before there can be approval for call, both
524 candidate and committee must agree that the course to public ministry is right and good for the candidate
525 and for Christ's Church.

526

¹⁶ This church's *Vision and Expectations* documents spell out its expectations of its rostered leaders, holding up a model of appropriate conduct in areas that include theological and churchly integrity, congregational, family, and community life, and other relationships and roles.

527 Similarly, mutual discernment is foundational for the policies and practices of this church related to call.
528 The congregation, synod, or churchwide organization discerns both missional needs and whether the
529 candidate being considered is likely to be able to serve in fulfilling that mission. The candidate, similarly,
530 discerns with others whether a particular place of call might draw forth her or his most faithful and
531 effective service. In a real sense, this process of mutual discernment continues as long as the rostered
532 leader holds that particular call.

533
534 The structures of this church provide both internal and external means for discerning whether standards
535 are being met. Public accountability to the standards is ongoing. Congregations and synods discern this
536 with their leaders. The synodical bishop serves as a resource to guide, mentor, and pray for each rostered
537 person, and represents the church in holding the person accountable for compliance with this church's
538 expectations.

539
540 Given this reliance on mutual discernment and public accountability, the three expressions of the ELCA¹⁷
541 have structures and processes already in place to help this church live faithfully together even when it
542 does not have consensus on some things. These provisions include being in conversation with one
543 another, holding one another accountable to this church's standards and processes, and allowing the
544 responsible group closest to the local ministry context to make the decision it discerns to be faithful, even
545 when a different decision might be made elsewhere. Within the ELCA, no congregation or other ministry
546 is forced to call or retain a particular candidate. As the task force wrote in its 2005 report, "In keeping
547 with the established standards of this church for ordained ministry, a congregation should strive, after
548 prayer and deliberation, to call a person whose gifts for ministry seem well-suited to the needs of that
549 particular community of faith." (page 16) Through preparation, call, and oversight, this church seeks to
550 ensure that all its ordained ministers, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and associates in ministry are
551 effective stewards of their ministries of Word and sacrament or Word and service.

552
553 The task force believes that these processes, with their emphasis on mutual discernment by individuals
554 and the church, serve this church well and does not wish to alter them in this aspect. It also recognizes
555 elements of flexibility within the existing process that can serve present needs.

556
557 **III. The recommended resolutions**

558 On the basis of the task force's study and listening in this church, it has repeatedly encountered and been
559 reminded that people in varying circumstances and of various opinions in this church are suffering
560 because of this church's disagreements regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. The
561 task force recognizes therefore our shared responsibility to bear one another's burdens and to honor the
562 bound consciences of all who disagree on whether lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships can
563 be a blessing in this church, to the neighbor, and for the world.

564
565 In this difficult situation this task force has been asked by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly "specifically to
566 address and make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any policies that
567 preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church."

568
569 On the basis of its prayer, listening, and deliberations, the majority of the task force recommends four
570 resolutions, proposing that each resolution be considered only if the preceding one has been approved.
571 The first two resolutions ask the assembly to clarify its will and intent to determine whether or not it

¹⁷ The three expressions of the ELCA are considered to be the congregation, the synod, and the churchwide organization.

572 wishes to change its policies. The third asks this church to reaffirm its commitment to respecting bound
573 consciences in the midst of disagreement. The fourth resolution, to be considered only if each of the first
574 three is approved by the assembly, proposes one way by which this church could incorporate flexibility
575 into its decision-making in order to allow the possibility of rostered service by a person living in a
576 publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.

577
578

- 579 1) RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations and synods that
580 choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-
581 gender relationships.
- 582
- 583 2) RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable,
584 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.
- 585
- 586 3) RESOLVED, that in the implementation of these resolutions, the ELCA commits itself to bear one
587 another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.
- 588
- 589 4) WHEREAS, guided by the Holy Spirit, this church raises up, calls, supports, and maintains rosters of
590 ordained ministers, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers for public ministry in
591 service of the mission of Christ and seeks faithfully to discern in each situation what will best serve that
592 mission; and

593 WHEREAS, this church maintains these four rosters according to policies and procedures that are
594 developed and applied according to the specifications of chapters 7 and 20 of its *Constitution, Bylaws and*
595 *Continuing Resolutions*; and

596 WHEREAS, this church has a polity, processes, and procedures that trust designated individuals and
597 bodies to use churchwide standards to make decisions about fitness for rostered ministry in general and
598 for call to a specific ELCA ministry; and

599 WHEREAS, some members, congregations, candidacy committees, and synods of the ELCA have
600 discerned gifts and skills for rostered ministry in some people who are or contemplate being in publicly
601 accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and have indicated their conviction that
602 rostering and calling such people would serve the mission and ministry of this church; and

603 WHEREAS, other members, congregations, candidacy committees, and synods of the ELCA
604 acknowledge those gifts and skills for ministry, but believe that this church must maintain an expectation
605 of celibacy for any gay or lesbian person, whether or not that person is in a publicly accountable, lifelong,
606 monogamous, same-gender relationship, and thus believe that this church cannot call or roster people in
607 such relationships; and

608 WHEREAS, the Church of Christ sometimes has been surprised by the actions of the Spirit, as is
609 reported in the book of Acts when the inclusion of Gentiles was affirmed; and

610 WHEREAS, public accountability of rostered leaders in the ELCA is essential to nurturing the trust
611 that is necessary for effective ministry; and

612 WHEREAS, although there is no generally recognized civil or ecclesial status that corresponds to
613 heterosexual marriage for publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, this
614 assembly has committed itself to find ways to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong,
615 monogamous, same-gender relationships; and

616 WHEREAS, present ELCA policies prohibit the rostered service of any and all people in publicly
617 accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, but this assembly has committed itself to
618 find a way for people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve
619 as rostered leaders of this church; therefore, be it

620 **RESOLVED**, that the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commit
621 themselves to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree regarding decisions
622 on the call and rostering of individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender
623 relationships, in this church and with churches ecumenically and globally; and be it further

624 **RESOLVED**, that this church, because of its commitment to respect the bound consciences of
625 all, declares its intent to incorporate structured flexibility in decision-making into its policies and
626 procedures so that synods, bishops, congregations, candidacy committees, and others involved in
627 the candidacy process and in the process of extending calls will be free to act according to their
628 convictions regarding both the approving or disapproving in candidacy and the extending or not
629 extending of a call to rostered service of a person who is otherwise qualified and who is living or
630 contemplates living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship; and
631 be it further

632 **RESOLVED**, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make provision in its policies
633 to eliminate the prohibition of rostered service by members who are in publicly accountable,
634 lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; and be it further

635 **RESOLVED**, that the appropriate churchwide unit(s) are directed to develop, in consultation
636 with the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council is directed to approve, appropriate
637 guidelines for a process by which congregations and synods that choose to do so could hold people
638 publicly accountable in their relationships who are in or contemplate being in lifelong,
639 monogamous, same-gender relationships and who seek to be on the rosters of this church; and be it
640 further

641 **RESOLVED**, that the Committee on Appeals is directed to develop, in consultation with the
642 Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council is directed to approve, appropriate amendments to
643 “Definition and Guidelines for Discipline” and the Vocation and Education program unit is
644 directed to draft, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council is
645 directed to approve, appropriate amendments to the *Vision and Expectations* documents and the
646 *Candidacy Manual* to accomplish the intent of this resolution; and be it further

647 **RESOLVED**, that additional policies be developed, as necessary, so that those whom this
648 church holds responsible for making decisions about fitness for rostered ministry in general and for
649 call to a particular specific ELCA ministry may discern, and have guidance in discerning, the
650 fitness for ministry of a member living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-
651 gender relationship; and be it finally

652 **RESOLVED**, that this church continue to trust its established processes and those to whom it
653 has given the responsibility to discern who should and should not be rostered or called to public
654 ministry in this church.
655

656 **Endnotes**

657 *Legislative history from page 1:*

658

659 **1: 2001 Churchwide Assembly, action CA01.06.28 (Yes-899; No-115):**

660 To respond to the memorials of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, the Southeast Michigan Synod,
661 the Upstate New York Synod, the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, and the Virginia Synod by
662 directing the Division for Ministry and the Division for Church in Society, in consultation with the
663 Conference of Bishops, ELCA seminaries, colleges and universities, and other churchwide units, to
664 implement jointly a churchwide study on homosexuality;

665 To provide that the process include creation of a study document on homosexuality for use in
666 congregations, synods, and in sponsored hearings and focus groups across this church. This document
667 shall include study of the Lutheran understanding of the Word of God and biblical, theological, scientific,
668 and practical material on homosexuality. The document shall address issues related to blessing committed
669 same-gender relationships, and rostering of approved candidates who are in committed same-gender
670 relationships. This study shall provide for the sharing of information from and among members of this
671 church;

672 To authorize the presiding bishop and Church Council to approve the parameters and expense
673 budget of this process and identify the revenue source(s) to provide for this study;

674 To direct that reports on the study process shall be presented to each of the regular meetings of
675 the Church Council, and to synod assemblies beginning in 2002 with response requested. A first edition
676 report shall be brought to the 2003 Churchwide Assembly along with initial or interim recommendations.
677 A final report, complete with action steps for full implementation, shall be presented to the 2005
678 Churchwide Assembly;

679 To respect charitably one another as we examine our understandings and practices, speaking the
680 truth in love, practicing the “mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters” (Luther,
681 *Smalcald Articles*, III.4); and

682 To request that the Division for Ministry, in consultation with the Division for Congregational
683 Ministries and the Conference of Bishops, identify and make available materials to assist and support
684 pastors as they provide pastoral care and counseling for persons concerned with these issues.

685

686 **2: 2001 Churchwide Assembly, action CA01.06.36 (Yes-624; No-381):**

687 To respond to the memorials of the Saint Paul Area and Metropolitan Chicago synods by
688 requesting that the Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, and the Division for Ministry create a
689 specific plan and timeline leading to a decision concerning the rostering of homosexual persons who give
690 expression to sexual intimacy only in a relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful, including but not
691 limited to:

- 692 1) changes in “Vision and Expectations”;
- 693 2) changes in “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline”;
- 694 3) amendments to the ELCA constitution and bylaws; and
- 695 4) changes in all other related governing documents.

696 In the event any of the above mentioned changes require approval of the ELCA Churchwide
697 Assembly, such actions shall be placed before the 2005 Churchwide Assembly for adoption or
698 ratification.

699

700 **3: 2001 Churchwide Assembly, action CA01.06.45 (Yes-561; No-386):**

701 To initiate a process within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to develop a social
702 statement on human sexuality.

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Appendix
Report on Ministry Policies
Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality

From the beginning, members of the task force have expressed varying degrees of difference in their opinions regarding the most faithful course for the ELCA, all based on deeply held convictions arising from Scripture and Lutheran theology, and Lutheran ethics. These views have been expressed repeatedly throughout the time of our deliberations as we struggled to reach agreement on recommendations that would be best for the ELCA at this time.

To offer a more complete picture of our discussions and to give clearer voice to the conscience-bound differences among us, we append two dissenting positions by members of the task force. We know that similar conscience-bound differences exist throughout this church and we hope that by including them, members of this church will know that a range of voices has been heard in the work of the task force.

719 **Dissenting Position 1**

720 **Affirming and upholding current policies**

721 Four reoccurring themes surfaced frequently throughout the years the task force has worked together.
722 These themes—a divided church, biblical interpretation, lack of consensus and conscience bound
723 individuals—were experienced on the task force, written in the reports and evident throughout the written
724 responses sent to the task force. Regrettably, this dissenting position reflects these realities both within the
725 task force as well as the struggles throughout the ELCA.

726
727 All members of the task force affirm welcoming all people into the life of this church, including those
728 whose sexual orientation is to people of the same gender. Likewise, all denounce violence and
729 discrimination against those who are homosexual. All support some fundamental social benefits such as
730 joint ownership of property and the ability to make medical decisions for another. All affirm pastoral care
731 for everyone to whom pastors and congregations minister, all of us sinners. This pastoral care is to be
732 offered with humility and confession, seeking God’s grace, mercy, and will for our lives. Nevertheless, all
733 cannot agree that homosexual unions are a natural form of sexual expression to be honored and publicly
734 affirmed on a level equal to a heterosexual marriage.

735
736 Because this church is divided and lacks consensus regarding both the ordination of non-celibate
737 homosexual individuals and the blessing of same-gender unions, to recommend broad change in the
738 present policies in the absence of consensus is extremely unwise and unfaithful. There may come a day in
739 which a new consensus based on God’s Word might mandate a change in teaching and practice as was
740 seen with slavery and women’s ordination. Or, over time, this church might find that its resolve grows
741 even stronger to maintain its foundational core beliefs such as with the authority of Scripture (2 Timothy
742 3:16), justification by faith alone (Romans 3:28), and the primacy of Christ (Acts 4:12). Lack of
743 consensus does not mandate a radical change, in fact, it argues for the opposite: a respite.

744
745 Because the ELCA is not the whole church and because the ELCA has no identity apart from the one,
746 holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, we cannot ignore or disregard the ecumenical church or the rest of
747 the Lutheran World Federation and their positions on sexuality and moral standards for those called to
748 serve in the ministry. Nor can we ignore or disregard the Scriptures and the 2000-year teaching of the
749 Church concerning human sexuality as God’s good gift in the created order. Rather, in faithfulness to the
750 Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are to maintain unity with others committed to the Church’s
751 teaching on sexuality until the Church is convinced by Holy Scripture and clear reason to change this
752 teaching.

753
754 Given the lack of unanimity among task force members, this dissenting position is offered:

- 755
- 756 • Affirm and uphold the current policies of the ELCA as stated in *Vision and Expectations* and
 - 757 *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*.
 - 758 • Affirm the pastoral guidance of the 1993 Statement of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, that “there
 - 759 is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church
 - 760 for the blessing of a homosexual relationship.” However, pastors within their local contexts are to
 - 761 “provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister.”
 - 762 • While the actions of future Churchwide Assemblies cannot be bound by the current assembly, we call
 - 763 upon this church to observe in good faith a ten-year moratorium on all matters concerning the
 - 764 blessing of same-sex unions and the rostering of practicing homosexual people until that time when a
 - 765 strong consensus might be reached.

766 **Dissenting Position 2**
767 **Position supporting full parity for all rostering and call decisions of the ELCA concerning people**
768 **who are in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships**
769

770 **Preface:**

771 After seven years of faithful study, conversation, and feedback concerning human sexuality, this church
772 still lacks consensus regarding faithful biblical, theological, and ethical interpretation concerning same-
773 gender sexual intimacy. Therefore, this position offers its recommendations for rostering of individuals in
774 same-gender relationships on justice and pragmatic grounds. Concerning justice, the ELCA has
775 repeatedly stated that it will not tolerate discrimination based on sexual orientation and yet it continues to
776 do so in its ministry policies by demanding celibacy of pastors who are homosexual in their self-
777 understanding even when legal pathways are currently available for recording their committed, lifelong
778 relationships. Pragmatically, some ELCA congregations have called pastors in committed same-gender
779 relationships to public ministry and others want or are planning to do so. In order to be held accountable
780 to common personal and professional standards, these pastors need to be part of the ELCA roster. In
781 addition, many in the ELCA are unwilling to enforce the current policy of the ELCA, which prohibits
782 such individuals from public ministry. Even if this church maintains its current policy, levels of ecclesial
783 disobedience to this policy will likely increase. Some congregations, pastors, and bishops in the ELCA
784 are currently acting against or are unwilling to support or enforce current church policy that bars public
785 ministry to people in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. Some ELCA congregations have
786 called pastors who are in same-gender lifelong committed relationships to public ministry. It is not a
787 question of whether this church should or should not “change” the policy. Rather, it is an issue of
788 truthfully acknowledging the change that has already occurred within the Body of Christ and working
789 with this reality in the most faithful, responsible manner.

790
791 Several additional reasons support this recommendation: First, this church has, through the Task Force for
792 ELCA Studies on Sexuality, struggled faithfully, seeking a singular theological and biblical interpretation
793 concerning same-gender sexual intimacy; instead it has found multiple, divergent views among lay
794 members, theologians, and pastors. Second, the ELCA has clearly affirmed its welcome of all people
795 regardless of sexual orientation through votes at the Churchwide Assembly (CA91.07.51, CA95.06.50,
796 CA99.06.27, CA05.05.18). Third, the ELCA currently allows people who are homosexual in their self-
797 understanding to serve as rostered leaders in the church if they remain celibate. However, Luther himself
798 considered celibacy to be a special gift of the Spirit granted to few people. Fourth, requirements for
799 rostered ministry in the ELCA include baptism, completion of the candidacy process, congregational call,
800 and the ability to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, and individuals in same gender, life-
801 long committed relationships can readily meet these important standards. In addition, previous church
802 documents emphasize the gift of human sexuality and the importance of fidelity and accountability in
803 relationships, and these standards can be applied to same-gender relationships as well. Lastly, the
804 church’s public ministry loses the gifts which these pastors can offer to this church and, in current policy,
805 denies the calling of the Holy Spirit to individuals in same-gender committed relationships who discern a
806 call to public ministry.

807
808 Given the lack of unanimity among task force members, this dissenting position is offered:
809

810 This church will make the necessary decisions so that:

- 811 • Race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation do not represent a barrier to any baptized member
812 of the ELCA who wishes to enter and complete the candidacy, call, and rostering process for public

- 813 ministry. Policies that prohibit from the ELCA roster people in publicly accountable, lifelong,
814 monogamous, same-gender relationships will be changed.
- 815 • Candidates in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships will be held to the same high
816 expectations of faithful, mutual, and publicly accountable, monogamous relationships as their
817 heterosexual colleagues. Any candidate for ministry who is in a committed relationship will be
818 expected to seek the highest available level of civil and legal accountability for their relationship and
819 will be encouraged to acknowledge and celebrate their committed relationships within the Body of
820 Christ and to avail themselves of pastoral support.
 - 821 • In order to hold all couples accountable, this church will develop the necessary liturgical rite for
822 speaking, in the presence of the community of faith, such vows and promises as will constitute a
823 public commitment by a same-gender couple to enter into a lifelong partnership that is faithful,
824 caring, supporting, durable, and loving.
 - 825 • The Churchwide Assembly will direct the ELCA Church Council, Vocation and Education program
826 unit, Conference of Bishops, and Committee on Appeals to take all steps necessary to amend this
827 church's specific policies on ministry to be in accordance with this recommendation.
 - 828 • The policy on reinstatement to the rosters of this church will be amended so that it provides an
829 expedited process for reinstating to the roster or to candidacy of an ordained or rostered lay minister
830 or candidate who resigned or was removed from the roster or from candidacy solely on account of
831 being in (or intending to be in) a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.
 - 832 • A process will be developed and expedited for the reception of ministers from other Christian bodies
833 whose reception was previously precluded solely on account of being in, or intending to be in, a
834 lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship.