

ELCA Task Force on Genetics

June 1-3, 2007

The Lutheran Center, Chicago, Illinois

Minutes

Present: Per Anderson, Jadon Berry, Jerry DeWitt, Juliette Kahle, Judy Klusman, Robert Lebel, Yvonne Marshall, Susan Martyn, Robin Mattison, Mary Minette, Linden Olson, Richard Perry, Carmelo Santos, Steven Ullestad, Patricia Zerega

Task Force Staff: Ron Duty, Roger Willer

Excused: Belletech Deressa, Leland Glenna, Margaret McLean, Paul Nelson, Ted Peters, Sandra Schlessinger, Janet Williams

Co-chair Per Anderson convened the meeting.

Roger Willer led devotions, centered around a “dwelling in the scripture” exercise.

Members of the task force present took turns introducing themselves to each other. (Brief notes about members unable to be present were later shared by staff.)

After a brief review of key logistical matters for the meeting, Roger Willer reviewed the meeting agenda.

Ron Duty and Roger Willer led a review of *Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American for Addressing Social Concerns*. This included an overview of the process and timeline projected for this social statement on genetics. Detailed discussion of the projected timeline noted that it called for publication of a study resource for the church in November of 2008, a possible meeting with the Conference of Bishops in October of 2009, and publication of a first draft 18 months prior to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly (February, 2010). A series of hearings coordinated by synods would be held on the first draft. This was followed by discussion. Susan Martyn requested that staff develop a brief sheet of talking points about the background for the social statement and its scope.

It was noted that members may identify themselves publicly as members of the task force, but if they speak publicly about the statement on genetics during its development, they speak only for themselves. Only the co-chairs and task force staff will represent the task force as a whole in public statements about development of the social statements. Task force members were asked to let the staff and co-chairs know about any writing (or major public speaking) they do about topics relevant to the social statement. As much as possible, we would like to operate with a policy of “no surprises” while encouraging professional contributions to the larger debate about genetics.

Roger Willer closed the Friday session with devotions.

Saturday morning’s session opened with responsive prayer and Psalm 104

Three ELCA social statements dealing with bioethics were reviewed: “Caring for Creation,” “Abortion,” and “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor.” These three were treated as examples of social statements and as helping to frame a context for work on genetics. The first two were discussed by the task force.

The “Report of the ELCA Consultation on Genetics” was reviewed and discussed. Task force members present who were part of the consultation each gave their own impressions and assessments of the consultation. This was followed by discussion of a summary of recommendations, by related groupings, made by the members of the consultation.

Task force members each gave a personal appraisal of the role and significance of genetics in society today and of their concerns about what is important in the development of the social statement..

Three small groups of task force members discussed separately the challenges to and resources of the Lutheran tradition for approaching genetics. Each of the groups then reported on its discussion to the whole task force. Resources in addition to those in the Lutheran tradition were also mentioned. The group reports were discussed in plenary.

The Sunday session opened with worship and Holy Communion. Steven Ullestad preached and presided.

The task force discussed the development of study materials on genetics for the church in light of the calendar for the development of the social statement discussed Friday in the meeting. Per Anderson proposed that the task force use the existing resource, *Genetics: Where Do We Stand as Christians* as the basis of the study. There was general consensus on the task force to do this, with some redrafting where needed and with the addition of new material where appropriate. It was suggested that a new title might help distinguish this study from the original. Roger Willer reviewed the general nature of the drafting process that would be required.

The task force set October 19-21, 2007 for its next meeting, and discussed a preliminary agenda for that meeting.

Possible dates for task force meetings in 2008 were considered. These possible dates will be checked with members not present before 2008 task force meetings are set.

The task force also discussed what topics (and possible presenters) it might need to learn more about in future meetings.

Ron Duty reviewed some information for the task force about arranging for and recording listening posts to gauge the concerns of ELCA members about genetics. The members of the task force exchanged ideas for possible listening posts they would attempt to organize. It was agreed that the October, 2007, agenda would include reports on listening posts held up to that point.

Per Anderson noted that in future meetings the task force would need to consider some key theological topics: the use of scripture in developing the social statement, in-depth discussion of issues in theological anthropology—or an understanding of humanity in light of an understanding of God, and an in-depth look at the triune God in creation, redemption and sanctification.

Anderson adjourned the task force meeting.