

Studying the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

--a suggested approach--

Before you begin:

- Read pages I and II of the draft document. Plan to explain what a social statement is and how the draft is part of the process, as found on pages I and II. **Please give specific attention to “Leading a discussion of the draft social statement.”**
- We recommend you plan to give at least two one-hour sessions to the study. Even more helpful would be three sessions. With three sessions, the last session could be devoted to discussing section V of the draft and filling out the response form. This will encourage feedback.
- Explain to your participants that you will be studying the draft sequentially but cannot give attention to everything. If your time is limited, you will need to determine ahead of time which passages and questions from this guide should be given priority and that these are representative of what is in the draft.

Begin each session with the dwelling in the Word exercise as explained below. We recommend that you provide a visual focal point—a bowl filled with water, a candle, and an open Bible.

Leader: Please join me in listening to a reading from the New Testament. It will be followed by a moment of silent reflection. Then, without further explanation, we will listen for what the Spirit is attempting to say in our church through our review of this draft.

A reading from Paul's letter to the saints and faithful brothers and sister in Christ in Colossae, Colossians 3:12-17

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(After reading, allow a short time for silent reflection.)

Leader: May the Word of God dwell in us richly.

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Study Session One

Dwelling in the Word exercise

Draft Section I: Introduction

The introduction talks about changes in the past six or seven decades in sexuality (p 2, lines 21-22). Look at footnote #1 and the changes summarized there.

- How have some of these changes affected your life?
- How have these changes affected your parents? your children or those you know well, or children you hope to have?
- How has culture challenged our understandings of sexuality?

The statement affirms that we are all created by God as sexual and therefore relational beings (p 3, lines 56-57). We are sexual from birth to death, whether we are in an intimate sexual relationship or not.

- If you think about sexuality as good, as a part of good creation, as a gift with which to please God, does that challenge the way you feel about yourself and your body?
- Think about sexuality as inherently good in relation to:
 - How sexuality is used to sell things.
 - Whether married sexuality is depicted in the media as pleasurable and exciting or boring and monotonous.
 - Does our focus on the sexuality of young people make those who are not young feel as if they are no longer expected to be sexual?

Draft Section II: Theological and ethical foundations for understanding sexuality

- Ask the question: What does being freed in Christ to serve the neighbor mean to you as a sexual being?

Lines 153-162.

- If you are freed from the paralyzing fear of doing the wrong thing, how does that free you do to the RIGHT thing?

Lines 164-85.

- How will we know if we are using our sexuality in a way that is pleasing to God if we always find in sexuality both our own sinfulness and God's grace?
- How does knowing that God is merciful and compassionate help you make choices when you're not sure what you should do? (see lines 253, 263, 280, and 295)

The Draft asks us to consider using the Lutheran interpretive guideline for Scripture of "what points to Christ." (p. 14: Line 389ff).

- What verses come to mind for you that "point to Christ?"
- What part of the Bible does a social statement on human sexuality have to include?

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Draft Section III: Sexuality as part of God's creative activity

The statement says a few things about sexuality that help us think of it as more than just what people do on a physical level.

462 "God created human beings to be in relationship with each other. The gift of sexuality is vital to this intention."

- How does sexuality help us relate to one another? How does it help relationships to grow?

478... "at some level, all sexual relationship is about companionship."

- Do you agree with this?
- What other forms of companionship are available to us?

490... "sexual love...does not by itself constitute a moral justification for sexual behavior."

- What are some of the ways that people justify the harmful consequences of inappropriate sexual behavior?
- How would you respond?

529 "Sexuality is deeply social as well as spiritual and biological."

- What are some examples of sexuality being spiritual? Biological? Social?
- How do these examples broaden your understanding of sexuality?

567 "This understanding of the social influence on sexuality...links what appear initially to be individual actions and troubles to larger social challenges and social sin."

Discuss this statement in terms of:

- Teen pregnancy
- Sexual harassment
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual abuse

Closing

Prayer (from *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor* congregational study): Good and gracious God, giver of all good gifts, we give you thanks for the gift of each other and for your church. As we seek to understand ourselves and our world, give us wisdom and patience. Help us to listen thoughtfully with profound respect for one another. Instill us with vision and imagination, forgiveness and humility. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen,

Leader: Go in peace.

All: Thanks be to God.

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Study Session Two

Dwelling in the Word exercise

Draft Section IV: Trust at the heart of faith active in love seeking justice

The draft uses the concept of trust as a way of describing our relationship with God (faith in God is described in the confessions as trust, or *fiducia*, line 583) and what we want to foster in our relationships with other people. We want trustworthy relationships with individuals and to build a trustworthy society.

Families

627 "...intimacy, trust and safety...are best sheltered within families." For this reason, the draft social statement describes families as an indispensable social institution (648), while recognizing that more than one familial arrangement "may fulfill these vital roles of providing safety, shielding intimacy, and building trust" (686).

- How did the family in which you were raised foster or not foster trust?
- What have you learned as an adult about fostering trust and shielding intimacy?
- How can the church support families to become a source of trust?

Protecting Children

776 "This church regards the over-exposure of emotionally maturing children and teens to adult sexuality as a failing on the part of adults and society."

- What are some examples of what the statement is talking about here?

Education is a primary concern (812-821).

- What are the elements of raising children into a healthy sexuality?
- How can the church support parents in their quest to raise children with a healthy sexuality?

Sexuality and Self

The draft notes that we are sexual from birth, and that

850-852 "...throughout our lives we need to find life-enhancing and appropriate ways of giving expression to this complicated dimension of ourselves."

- What are some life-enhancing ways for single people to give expression to their sexuality?

Gender and Friendships

898-899 "Because we are all sexual creatures, friendship relations do have a sexual dimension. They are expressive of our longing for human connection and the privilege and warmth of human touch."

- How have friendships that you have experienced expressed some of that longing for human connection?
- How have you maintained boundaries on those friendships to ensure they are not harmful to other relationships?

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(936-938) “Employers must pay particular attention to work relationships between colleagues, both where there are power differentials, and where the workplace environment is rendered sexually offensive or hostile by the conduct of coworkers.”

- What actions would be inappropriate in the work environment?
- How can we care for the neighbor if we are aware of situations of sexual power and abuse in our work place?

Commitment and Sexuality

968 “For this reason, this church teaches that degrees of physical intimacy should be carefully matched to degrees of affection and commitment.”

- How does this help (or not help) those making decisions about sexual intimacy?

Marriage

1038 “It is in marriage that the public promises of lifetime commitment create the foundation for trust, intimacy, and safety.”

- What kinds of promises are required of a couple to make this happen?
- How can a community support or undermine a marriage?

Relationships....

1055 “...many pastors and parents have come to recognize the contemporary pressures that encourage adult cohabitation.” 1072 “This church does not favor or give approval to cohabitation arrangements outside of marriage.”

- What are the contemporary pressures (economic, social, demographic) that encourage adult cohabitation?
- What should the response of the church be?
- What should your pastor say to a cohabitating young adult? To a cohabiting senior?

Same-gender committed relationships

1116 “After many years of study and conversation, this church does not have a consensus regarding love and committed same-gender relationships.” 1137 “We believe that this church has a pastoral responsibility to all children of God. This includes pastoral response to those who are same-gender in their orientation and to those who are seeking counsel about their sexual self-understanding.”

- Given a lack of consensus, the draft draws on a tradition of caring for the neighbor. What ways of caring for our neighbor does it suggest?

The necessity of mercy, always

1182 “Given finitude and sin, many things happen in even the strongest relationships that threaten trust. Forgiveness and reconciliation, then, join with mutuality and justice to support the life of adult intimacy.”

- What kinds of things happen even in strong relationships to threaten trust?
- How can forgiveness and reconciliation happen?

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Draft Section V. Social trust and the common good

1197 “Contemporary social scientists... are beginning to articulate what close-knit communities have long known: trust must be the foundation for laws and social arrangements and fill the inevitable gaps they leave.”

- Think about the following situation—the stoplights at an intersection near your house have gone out. What is likely to happen?

1300 “This church therefore notes with grave concern the public commodification (transformation into something that can be bought and sold) of the body as an economic asset.” 1321 “This church must speak out against all that systematically undermines efforts to raise healthy children and build solid marriages and trusting relationships. This church must insist that the existence of a market is not a sufficient moral basis to use it.” Name some forms of public commodification of the body (a few are listed in lines 1303-1306).

- How do you think public commodification of the body might undermine healthy sexuality?

Closing

Prayer (from *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor* congregational study): O loving God, to turn away from you is to fall, to turn toward you is to rise, and to stand before you is to abide forever. Grant us, dear God, in all our duties your help; in all our uncertainties your guidance; in all our dangers your protection; and in all our sorrows your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW page 87).

Leader: Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness, be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Thanks be to God.