

## **PREFACE**

Among the important matters addressed during the Lutheran World Federation Tenth Assembly in July 2003 was the issue of “Justice and Healing in Families.” For the Assembly delegates from the LWF member churches, who had gathered under the theme, “For the Healing of World,” this topic was the subject of animated and diverse discussion in plenary session.

In a changing world, the integrity of the family as a place of love, nurture and safety is continually challenged and often broken by violence, disease, the impact of poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, and changing patterns for our life in community. Within our global communion, there are widely divergent understandings and compositions of families, with different cultural practices and taboos. The challenge is to pursue justice and healing in this context, with the necessary tolerance and respect.

The Assembly debated at length the changing realities in relation to family, gender and sexuality in today’s world. The tension that arose within the Assembly when looking at the different forms of family, grew when it touched on the subject of homosexuality and the churches’ attitude to homosexual persons. It is indeed a complex matter with ethical dimensions related to culture, anthropology and spirituality. Since we are a communion of churches, and therefore interdependent, no member church can ignore the issue or consider it closed (in one way or another) while sister churches are still struggling with it.

It is for this reason that the Assembly participants committed themselves and called on member churches to “encourage and support one another in

- a) study and respectful dialogue on issues of marriage, family and human sexuality, in a manner appropriate to the needs of each member church, and
- b) advocacy for the human rights and dignity of all persons regardless of gender or sexual orientation.”

In 2004, the new LWF Council (elected at the 2003 Assembly) appointed a Task Force representing the seven geographical regions of the Communion. Those appointed were Rev. Kristin Tomasdottir (Iceland - Chairperson and Council member), Ms Kristin Anderson Ostram (USA), Prof. Jan-Olav Henriksen (Norway), Dr Lothar Carlos Hoch (Brazil), Prof. Otieno Malo (Kenya), Rev. Dr Ken Phin Pang (Malaysia – who later resigned for health reasons), Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis (Lithuania) and Rev. Manuela Tokatli (Austria). The Task Force was mandated “to reflect biblically, historically and ethically on the practices and attitudes identified, and give specific attention to whether, and how, different hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, and different ethical attitudes, practices and policies, which affect the unity of the Church, may be dealt with.”

Upon invitation, the member churches forwarded to the LWF Secretariat their own studies, reflections and documentation on the subject. The Task Force analyzed and incorporated the material in their work, and studied resource material from the World Council of Churches (especially from the Faith and Order Commission) and other members of the Christian world

communions, as well as existing complementary work within the LWF Secretariat. I take the opportunity to express the gratitude of the Task Force for the extremely valuable studies and documentation, which reflect thoroughly the diversity on this subject within and among the member churches.

The Task Force met twice, in April 2005 and January 2006. From the beginning, the different cultural and ethical heritage of each Task Force member became apparent and continued to be a challenge for everyone until the guidelines were written. However, the Task Force members learned to listen to one another, to understand and respect the cultural and spiritual differences and to seek God's guidance in overcoming deadlocks. At the close of the second meeting, the Task Force agreed on the *Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality*. The Task Force members were invited to read the document once more, after returning to their respective countries, and to give their comments to the Chairperson. Except for minor observations and editorial changes, all members but one adopted the guidelines.

It is with appreciation and admiration for the work of the Task Force that I present to you the *Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality*.

My personal thanks go to the wonderful and insightful persons appointed by the Council to the Task Force. All of them took on the assignment with diligence and sincerity. It was my privilege to work with them and learn from them. Professor Jan-Olav Henriksen documented what was discussed at the meetings and assembled the report. I also wish to thank LWF General Secretary Dr Ishmael Noko for sharing with us his wisdom and observations, and for the secretarial assistance given by Mrs. Ingrid Krähenbühl.

Rev. Kristin Tomasdottir  
Chairperson

**The Lutheran World Federation: Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality  
Proposed Guidelines and Processes  
for Respectful Dialogue**

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## The Lutheran World Federation: Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality

### *Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue*

The Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) appointed a Task Force in September 2004 to review related material from the member churches (collected by the Secretariat) and “to propose guidelines and processes for dialogue by which respectful discussion can be pursued” on marriage, family and human sexuality. In the following two chapters of this report, the Task Force will first outline a Lutheran framework for dealing with such issues, and then suggest guidelines and a description of possible processes to enhance further dialogue.

### **Part I. A Lutheran Framework: Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality**

#### *The Gospel as the unifying center<sup>1</sup>*

The Lutheran Confessions hold three interrelated principles to be of constitutive importance for theological doctrine based on the teachings of the Bible: *solus Christus*, *sola Scriptura* and *sola gratia*. These theological understandings (Christ alone, Scripture alone and grace alone) lay the foundation for our discussions. We call attention to them because we understand them to be significant in the context of the topics we are discussing.

**Christ.** First and foremost, *Christ alone* means reading the Scriptures primarily as a witness to Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Christ is the center of the Scriptures, to whom everything points. In the Lutheran context, there can be no other interpretation of Scripture than the one aiming at the proclamation of Christ. To emphasize the principle of *solus Christus* is to witness that it is Christ’s work for us that is the most important element in Lutheran theology, and that this should help us avoid a theology that has its basic point of reference in what we do, what we fail to do, and what we are not able to do. Over against such approaches, the proclamation of Christ and his work alone helps the Church to avoid a path of self-righteousness or prescribing anything else as conditions for being justified in the eyes of God.

**Grace.** *Sola gratia* is another way of expressing the same truth: it means that we are saved by grace alone. By God’s grace alone we enter into a renewed relationship with God and with one another. Nothing else is at the very heart (constitutive) of being a Christian than the recognition and reception of this grace. This theological foundation rules out every effort to make the human’s own work or actions requirements for membership in the Church (cf. Galatians 3,10f.). This principle expresses itself most explicitly in the fact that we baptize children when they are still too small to do anything or to be responsible for their behavior and actions (cf. Ephesians 2, 8-10 and *Joint Declaration* § 25).

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<sup>1</sup> This section addresses the understanding of the works and gifts of the Triune God as God is witnessed in both the Old and the New Testaments, as creator, saviour and sanctifier of the world. This implicit Trinitarian approach is reflected in the material from the churches, and we therefore consider it as an element of ongoing importance in the framework for discussion of these issues in our member churches.

This understanding of the Christian as “saved by grace alone” does not render good works irrelevant for the Christian. However, from a theological perspective, the good works emerge out of receiving this grace, and are a natural consequence of the righteousness of God (cf. *Confessio Augustana VI*). The good works cannot create this righteousness. Moreover, the Christian remains a sinner in spite of this new identity as righteous. Hence, the Christian is called to daily repentance for sins, and to trust in God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ (cf. also *Joint Declaration* § 28-29).

**Scripture:** The principle *sola Scriptura* is developed to safeguard against the construction of human custom or other requirements for participating in God’s grace. Scripture (the Bible) reveals the work of Christ for us. The grace proclaimed in the Gospel is compromised when one adds requirements about works that we must do as an additional condition for receiving God’s work of grace as a work for us. Therefore, when it comes to Church doctrine – as an expression of what is necessary in order to participate in God’s saving grace – no tradition, no ministry, no council or synod can add anything to what the Scripture proclaims as a necessary requirement for salvation. *Sola Scriptura* is thus another way to express the *sola gratia* and the *solus Christus* principles.<sup>2</sup>

The authority of Scripture (the Bible) is absolute when it relates to teaching about the conditions for justification and salvation: no one is allowed to add anything to this, as that would imply reducing the act and sacrifice of Christ. Such additions would make human insights, works or efforts partly constitutive of our salvation, which is named by Luther as “righteousness by works” or “works righteousness.” In this respect, the Scriptures are the *norma normans* – the norm from which everything else is derived when it comes to the teachings of the Gospel (cf. *Confessio Augustana XV* as well as *Apol. XV*).

To uphold the work of Christ as the central content of the Gospel means that sin is to be understood as a lack of fear of God, a lack of trust in God, and having an evil will (cf. *Confessio Augustana II*). Sin is thus expressing itself first and foremost in the will to secure one’s own righteousness by one’s own works, and by trusting one’s own works rather than the work of God. Sin is basically a human disposition, which makes the human center around the self, rather than trusting God and loving the neighbor. Thus, sin as a basic attitude toward God is destructive of the relationship towards God, as well as the relationship with, and the life of, the neighbor. In other words, by setting us free from sin, Christ frees us to trust God and to serve our neighbor with love. Prior to God’s work of justification, an awareness of our sinful nature and our sinful deeds needs to be evoked within us through the Law given from God.

Matters of family, marriage and human sexuality are not what constitute the Gospel or make us able to receive it. They belong to the area where God’s Law is proclaimed. They are not to be rendered irrelevant for us; they represent areas in which we are called to live in accordance with God’s will. Throughout history, the Church has had different views on how to order these matters. That has not restricted its ability to preach the Gospel and to witness to the works of Christ as the basis for our salvation. However, too much emphasis on these issues, when we are to witness to the work of Christ, might contribute to people not seeing him and his work as the central message in the Scriptures.

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<sup>2</sup> In the material from the member churches, we can recognize how important the churches consider the Scriptures to be when dealing with the issues in question. This rich and vast variety of resources of study cannot be recollected here, but we refer to these for further work within the member churches.

The relevant conclusion to these deliberations can be found in *Confessio Augustana VII*, where it is said that what is necessary for the true unity of the Church is consensus on the Gospel (as expressed above in the elaborations on *solus Christus, sola Scriptura and sola gratia*) and on the distribution of the sacraments. This is the only matter on which the Church can be divided. Moreover, according to the Lutheran understanding, different local customs and regulations are quite possible as long as these are not made requirements for salvation. In this manner also, a central principle in the Scriptures (Bible) and in Christian teaching is safeguarded, which helps us to judge more securely with reference to what is necessary and what is not necessary for the unity of the Church.

***The doctrine of the two kingdoms as a relevant framework for discussions  
on family, marriage and human sexuality***

The Lutheran reformers developed a helpful approach to dealing with matters of morality and ethics. It serves both to safeguard the Gospel against the temptations for additional requirements than the grace of God, and to see within which context the issues of family, marriage and human sexuality can be addressed from a Lutheran point of view. Hence, we suggest that the doctrine of the two kingdoms can be applied as a useful tool to deal with these matters.

God is the Lord of creation and the Church. In the Church, God rules by the Gospel, and in the world, by the Law. Through both, God's will is expressed for humans and for all of creation. Contrary to some other churches, the Lutheran church sees matters of family, marriage and human sexuality, as well as ethics in general, to be civil matters – that is, based in what is called the *worldly* realm in the doctrine of the two kingdoms. In the *spiritual* realm, the Word of the Gospel rules and this is the place for faithful life in the Church. However, like all others, Christians are also part of a civil society, in which there are different laws, and where God's Law rules. In the worldly realm, we have to make use of reason. How laws are spelled out and regulated is determined by the moral and ethical insight that the members of society have in matters of justice, etc. The Law of God here expresses itself also among those who do not believe in the Gospel (cf. Romans 2,14ff.).

Today, matters of family, marriage and human sexuality are being discussed both within the context of national jurisprudence, as well as within the framework of different human rights institutions. These discussions express that there are unresolved problems in the different realms with which the civil society struggles to come to grips. The doctrine of the two kingdoms helps Lutherans recognize the validity and the importance of such deliberations, and to partake in them on the same level and with the same competence as all other members of society.

From a Christian ethical point of view, it is important that the legislation and the human rights regulations are developed such that they can secure the values that uphold and promote human community and the future of God's creation. What the civil society decides is not done to please God or merit favor before God (cf. *Confessio Augustana VI*), but to serve the neighbor. This is also how it should be, according to Lutheran doctrine, as such stewardship is according to God's will and safeguards the cross of Christ as the only condition for our salvation.

Moreover, the Bible has an important contribution also in this *worldly* realm, despite the fact that it cannot claim to have the same kind of absolute authority in contextually-based moral matters

as in matters concerning salvation (cf. how *sola Scriptura* was developed to secure *solus Christus* and *sola gratia*). They help to illuminate the issues under discussion, and to highlight values and concerns that are of importance for the well-being of the neighbor. Luther himself was deeply aware of the contextual character of the moral teachings of the Bible, and even referred to the Ten Commandments as “The Mirror of Saxony for the Jews.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, in this civil or worldly realm, there is always a necessary exchange between the Bible, insights into context, deeper values and concerns, and experience and reason in general. No church can neglect or ignore the concerns and reasons of the Bible when judging what seems “just” in developing legal or moral structures and action in the civil realm.

It follows from this that the Church needs to have a critical role towards the development of society as well as an affirmative one. The Church does not make social acceptance the final criterion for what is acceptable, but judges the legislation and the developments in the civil realm also from the teachings of the Scriptures. However, the Church has no worldly power in these matters, and cannot force upon society a particular legislation or social order. It needs to appeal to the insights, wisdom and understanding of the members of society in order to be heard in worldly matters.

Accordingly, different understandings of family, marriage and human sexuality (which are also present in various nuances of understanding in the Scriptures) and how we order our lives when it comes to these issues, cannot affect the center of the Gospel. Nonetheless, they are of interest for the Church, and cannot be neglected. They have a high importance as parts of our worldly calling, but this importance is, from a Lutheran point of view, related to their place within the civil or worldly realm, as it is called in the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Humans sin within the worldly realm when they destroy the conditions for the good life of the neighbor or oneself. Such sin might express itself in the violation of human dignity or in destruction of the goods of creation. As expressions of such sin related to our topic, we can see domestic violence, rape, human trafficking and prostitution, only to mention a few. Although not all of these are mentioned as sins in the Bible, we can address them as such and call people to repent from them as expressions of injustice and disobedience towards God’s Law. This repentance includes the honest effort of individual Christians and the Christian community to produce the fruits of grace, and willingly to live out the call of obedience as children of God reborn by the Spirit.

The understanding of what may be the concrete expressions of sin and injustice might differ from context to context and from one historical epoch to another. Although we may not agree within the Lutheran churches on what are the concrete expressions of sin, we can agree that sin expresses itself in the worldly realm as injustice and destruction of life conditions. On the other hand, in the spiritual realm sin expresses itself in lack of trust in the works of God for us (lack of faith and trust in God; cf. the reference to *Confessio Augustana II* above). Context and culture shape our perceptions about the concrete consequences of sin, and challenge us to discuss why and how we should evaluate the different practices that exist within the societies where the different churches serve. As long as this is recognized as a discussion about securing justice in the worldly realm, it has no bearing on the understanding of the Gospel of salvation. Therefore, we

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to a medieval document used for the rule in Saxony, and Luther compared this with the Ten Commandments, thereby recognizing how different people may have different expressions of the will of God.

can differ on our judgments in this aspect of the worldly realm and still be able to maintain unity based on the gift of the Gospel.

### *Two examples as models*

There are two examples that can serve to illuminate differences within the Church on how to assess matters in the civil or worldly realm. We suggest considering these examples as models for the differences we face within the Lutheran communion on family, marriage and human sexuality. The reason why we suggest these examples is that they are fairly well known and easy to understand, while at the same time not so heavily “charged” as matters of sexuality. Thus, they might serve as a possible way to address the issues from a different and less controversial perspective. We recognize however, that they might appear more relevant and illuminating in some contexts than in others, and that their illustrative function might be different in different places.

A well-known example from Church history is how the Church has accepted two incompatible attitudes towards whether Christians should serve in military forces. There are understandable reasons and a Scriptural basis for both. What one decides has to be based on both an understanding firmly grounded in Scripture, and a thorough understanding of the relevant context. The Church has accepted that in such matters, the individual should not be forced to act against conscience.

Another example of how the change of context may render traditional theological teaching problematic is the attitude towards charging interest, as this can be found both in the Bible and in the history of theology. Traditionally, the Church has been very critical towards this. Luther himself expressed an attitude that seems impossible to practice in today’s world.

You should lend freely, and take your chances on getting it back or not. If it comes back, take it; if it does not, it is a gift. According to the gospel there is thus only one distinction between giving and lending, namely, a gift is not taken back, while a loan is taken back – if it is returned – but involves the risk that it may become a gift. He who lends expecting to get back something more or something better than he has loaned is nothing but an open and condemned usurer, since even those who in lending demand or expect to get back exactly what they lend, and take no chances on whether they get it back or not, are not acting in a Christian way.<sup>4</sup>

Today, we all know that our society would not function without the possibility of charging interest. On the other hand, we also know that this practice creates and maintains poverty in many countries. In order to resolve the issue we cannot simply refer back to the Bible, but have to ask in what manner we can deal responsibly not only with the texts and the tradition, but also with how we can practice it in today’s world. To do that, we need careful deliberations and the use of reason, as well as the love for the neighbor.

Furthermore, we also know that differences remain within the churches with regard to women’s ordination. On these issues, the churches within the Lutheran communion have decided not to divide (cf. the commitments of the LWF Curitiba Assembly, 1990). This does not make the issue

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<sup>4</sup> Luther: “Sermon on Trade and Usury”; *Luther’s Works*, Volume 45, Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1955.

of women's ordination an irrelevant and unimportant question to any of us. Therefore, we would suggest that we continue to approach the issues of family, marriage and human sexuality along similar lines. In order to promote these discussions, we present some guidelines in the next section of our report.

## **Part II. Guidelines Concerning Discussions on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality**

The Task Force has been given the mandate “to propose guidelines and processes for dialogue by which respectful discussion can be pursued.” Accordingly, we offer the following *reflections and guidelines*.

### ***The biblical and theological foundation for dialogue***

Information and materials were requested from member churches on the matters of marriage, family and human sexuality. After reading and discussing the materials, the Task Force noted the following common themes.

The self-understanding of Lutheran churches is evolving, and is not a static repetition of concerns from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In their deliberations as a communion, the Lutheran churches have shared considerable experience when it comes to understanding what binds us together. At the same time, the churches live together in a situation in which they also accept and allow space for diversity as well as tolerance – both within their own cultural contexts and globally. These are rich resources on which we suggest that the churches continue to build their fellowship. We recognize this as one of the lasting fruits of the ecumenical movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the material we have reviewed, the Bible was often cited. This indicates that all the churches in our Communion agree on the Bible as the authority for, and from which, the questions under consideration must be addressed.

We realize that the presented material testifies to how the Bible is read in different contexts and from different perspectives. It is read with different elements of working knowledge involving scientific, cultural and traditional resources. Realizing this, we call for a careful and respectful consideration of how each and every one of us uses the Bible as a means for addressing issues of family, marriage and human sexuality.

The material from the churches also testifies clearly to the conviction that all humans are created in the image of God, and that they should be respected and their human rights secured. This conviction is not compromised by differences in class, age, gender, race or sexual orientation.

The vast amount of material provided by the churches is hard to summarize in detail in a manner that pays sufficient respect to the detailed and careful considerations offered. However, the member churches are well-advised to collect material from other churches in order to gain different perspectives on the issues in question, as well as to learn what created the differences in positions.

Moreover, what becomes clear from a survey of the material is that the differences between the member churches on the issues we address as a Task Force do not go solely along the lines of different contexts, for example, a “secular West” vs. a “traditional South.” The dividing lines are not drawn clearly by geography, but more so by *how* one reads the Bible, and *what* one emphasizes as the most important elements in the teachings of the Bible. If we look at the responses of the member churches from the latter perspective, questions of place and traditional-versus-secular are placed in the background.

From our reading, we can identify two distinctive features in the material.

a) The first feature is openness to homosexuality, which is most present in churches where there has been a long and open debate and which serve in contexts where there is also some kind of contemporary cultural acceptance of homosexuality. This openness has, most likely, made it necessary for the churches to review their traditional approach and practices, and to reflect on the normative nature of biblical material regarding sexuality. As these churches find it difficult to identify what kind of values are protected by a restrictive view, the tendency is to base a more positive affirmation of practices in other, more general principles of Christian teaching, that is, ones that are not so marked by an emphasis on the centrality of procreation as are the traditional Biblical teachings on sexuality. The openness might also be related to cultural plurality and to different forms of legislation.

To recognize that approaches to human sexuality are linked to the values of the cultural context is of utmost importance in order to identify the hermeneutic principles with which we interpret the biblical texts. For example, in some cultures with predominant traditional values that are more or less similar to the biblical world, the interpretation might be different and the problems identified otherwise than in other areas. However, no culture is precluded from being scrutinized critically in terms of the extent to which it helps people live their lives in a way that promotes the well-being and recognition of the human dignity of the neighbor (cf. above).

A historical-critical approach to the Bible might be helpful in order to distinguish between the enduring will and Word of God, and what is a part of the culture of the biblical context. In order to identify the will of God, the churches need to ask: What are the values and positive aims that the teachings of the Bible want to secure, and do we need to secure these today by different means than 2000 years ago? This reflection also follows from what we said about using the means of reason when dealing with ethical issues in the civil realm (cf. above).

b) The second feature in the submitted material seems to be an implicit tension between “theologians and scholars” and others, even though many churches seem to rely considerably on what biblical scholars and ethicists say about the issues. We would encourage further dialogue in order to reduce such tensions, because the Church needs solid biblical and theological scholarship in order to deal with many of the different issues we are facing in the world today. The use of such scholarship might imply that it becomes harder to read and use the biblical texts in a literal way, but it might also provide the Church with a more solid basis for using the Bible when addressing current issues. It might even promote more respect for, and understanding of, the Bible as it helps people to see it as part of, and related to, specific historical contexts that we do not fully share with the biblical authors.

In addition to these two features, there is another noteworthy fact. Although member churches report that they face internal differences, almost none of those churches seem to draw the line between the differing parties in such a way that the parties declare that they are unable to continue their fellowship with each other. Hence, it seems that the churches who face differences internally do not perceive that this should divide the Lutheran church. This is not surprising, given the Lutheran framework for dealing with such matters, as has been developed above. This also testifies to an important element in the whole discussion: those whom we have come to know and love we will not part from, even though there are matters on which we have different opinions. At the same time, when the Lutheran churches indicate that they do not see sexuality as

an issue dividing them, this does not exclude the fact that they often see this as a serious and important issue with which they must live, and which calls for engagement and decisions.

### *Common points of judgment and interpretation*

Working on the material provided by our Lutheran churches as well as other ecumenical partners, and trying to assess points of common concern and interest, the Task Force realized that it would be helpful to analyze marriage, family and sexuality under the topics of aims, norms, means and people. When considering common elements in what makes people responsible to each other in the relations of marriage, family and sexuality, we propose the following reflections for consideration by the member churches. These reflections represent the considerations of the Task Force (addressed either as “Task Force” or as “we” in the following) but they are developed on the basis of, and informed by, the material provided by the churches.

#### **Marriage: aims, norms and institutional means**

The Task Force is agreed in holding procreation as an important aim, but not a necessary aim for marriage. Furthermore, we think that an important aim for a marriage is the provision of a framework for personal fulfillment and flourishing (including sexual and spiritual), as well as security for personhood and mutual interdependence.

In order to realize these aims, we find that the norms for best safeguarding these aims are to have a lifelong, socially-recognized and faithful relationship, which is based on equality and various mutual obligations (economic, emotional, sexual etc.), and which is expressed through a monogamous relationship.

The best means for realizing these aims and norms is to understand marriage as being based on an established, distinguishable unity that is, and should be, recognized by society (and often is also recognized by faith-based communities including churches).

Traditionally, the churches have held that a marriage consists of two individuals of the opposite sex.

*Comments:* While we acknowledge that the above are important elements in a marriage, we also realize that some of the aims and norms are not always fulfilled, and that this might challenge families, individuals and the churches. These basic elements for a marriage need to be lived out in love. However, we all know that not only love, but also abuse and violence, take place within the framework of marriage. This abuse and violence should not be ignored. Knowing that not all marriages are lived out in love, respect and fidelity, the institution of marriage nevertheless still provides a better framework for developing relationships than arrangements that lack such frameworks.

In a Lutheran context, we can understand marriage as one of the special callings that God has for most of us in the civil realm. This calling is also the background for why we often find that churches offer a blessing when a civil marriage has taken place. However, asking for God’s blessing in the Lutheran context does not mean declaring the marriage sacred. We think that marriage is a good civil order that God has ordained for those who want to live in a life-lasting relationship with a special other person of the opposite sex.

This does not rule out that sometimes the norms and aims of marriage are not fulfilled any longer, and that this might constitute a situation in which divorce would be a solution. Divorce is a sign that the relationship within the institution of marriage has broken down, but it does not exclude the possibility that God can call us to remarry. The Lutheran churches have had, and still have, different practices, procedures and evaluations of remarriage. However, few, if any, of the churches in the LWF have made this issue decisive in terms of church membership or receiving the sacraments, etc. This is also in accordance with the insights spelled out in the Lutheran framework for dealing with such matters (see the previous section).

**Family: aims, norms and institutional means**

The Lutheran churches are agreed in seeing a family as a group of people that may include children or several generations, and who are related to each other over time in order to nourish a lifelong environment for their mutual maturing, learning and growth.

We find expressed in the material that the basic norms and values for a family are: responsibility; fidelity; discipline; mutuality; justice; respect and honesty towards children and adults; and safeguarding the values protected by human rights in relationship to health, education and social well-being.

The means for upholding a family comprise sufficient housing and economic conditions in order to satisfy the needs of the members; and recognition of the family as a separate unit by the state or other authorities.

The people in a family include a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage (cohabitation) or adoption.

*Comments:* Our churches differ somewhat on how to define a family with respect to the difference between a family and a household, and whether or not to consider two people cohabiting under the same roof and sharing a bed and table as a family.

Within the Task Force we discussed many current configurations of families in the world: child-headed families, single-headed families, grandparent-headed families or two parents from two households raising children. Sometimes, one does not have the opportunity to share the responsibilities and duties with a spouse or another family member, and there are also families based on polygamous marriage. The Lutheran churches will have to work further and discuss the various forms of family that we find in the world presently.

**Human sexuality: aims, norms and institutional means**

From the material received from the member churches, the Task Force was able to build an understanding of the purposes and aims of human sexuality as follows: to enable sexual acts, joys and desires; to deepen mutual loving relationships between adult people; to serve procreation; to enhance communication; and to support personal fulfillment.

In order to safeguard these purposes, we find that the norms of love, fidelity, mutuality, responsibility, and respect are important, and that sexual relationships ought to be based on non-exploitative practices of equality.

The Task Force saw in the material the means for fulfilling the above: bodies; needs and desires; the trustful relationship in which the dignity and vulnerability of the individual is safeguarded; and safe and legal access to contraception and sex education.

With respect to people and human sexuality, the Task Force found in the material provided by the member churches that there is consensus that human sexuality is reserved for two people in an exclusive committed relationship. However, the basic issue on which our churches may differ is that the purpose or aim of human sexuality could also apply to people in same-sex or unmarried heterosexual relationships.

*Comment:* From a relational point of view, one can assume that both same-sex couples and unmarried heterosexual couples can live up to many of the purposes or aims of human sexuality. Hence, the churches should continue to discuss whether sexuality in such relationships should be perceived as having or not having positive elements in terms of realized values and norms.

### **Conclusion**

In light of our Lutheran theological heritage and *Confessio Augustana VII*, we believe that it is important for the churches to continue considering to what extent there are reasons to claim that issues of family, marriage and human sexuality (including homosexuality) might be potentially dividing for the Lutheran churches while, at the same time, the churches are able to live in communion despite differences with regard to how we evaluate issues such as women's ordination, divorce and remarriage, the use of contraceptives and cohabitation.

While we recognize that different cultural contexts influence the ways in which we evaluate the importance of issues regarding family, marriage and human sexuality, we also would encourage the member churches to see these different cultures as a God-given context for the proclamation of the Gospel and God's will for humanity. How God's will is best realized might very well differ from context to context. To recognize and respect the differences in context might also call us to respect the differences in how we evaluate the issues we are discussing here. However, for the member churches this should not lead to practices of discrimination and condemnation. As the Lutheran communion, we are also responsible to each other for our practices and the way our churches teach the doctrine of salvation.

The churches are asked to consider what, in the issues at stake, is contrary to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the doctrine of justification by grace alone, the article on which the Church stands or falls (*Confessio Augustana IV*). Considering this, we conclude that the issues we have been appointed to discuss and make recommendations regarding, need not threaten to divide the Lutheran communion, even though there are disagreements about these issues. Other churches may have different theological approaches to such issues. However, these differences do not mean that the Bible, or the issues in question, are not taken seriously. They should be recognized as serious for the churches as well as for the people who are involved in these issues with their lives and their faith, and who are asking if there is a place for them in the church that proclaims justification by grace alone.

### *Guidelines for processes and dialogue*

As guidelines for processes and dialogue we recommend the following to the member churches of the Lutheran communion, as they discuss issues of marriage, family and human sexuality.

- Invite church members to read the Scriptures in light of their central message – salvation in Jesus Christ and justification by grace alone – and to address the issues and potential disagreements in question from that perspective.
- Consider carefully the question: *Why* does the Bible say what it does? – not only *what* it is saying.
- Realize that diversity in opinions on matters of practices and conduct is apostolic in the sense that diversity has been evident since the times of the New Testament and the beginning of Christianity (cf. Acts 15).
- Relate to other positions on the ecumenical scene, and develop the Lutheran position in relation to other churches and organizations, as well as in accordance with our own Lutheran theological heritage.
- Respect the principle of free conscience so that no-one is forced to conform to practices that are contrary to what he or she finds biblically-based.
- Continue to work and live and share together, in order to learn from each other and mature in the insights concerning the questions discussed, realizing that the differences are not to be overcome in the foreseeable future.
- Consider that, within these issues, there exist incompatibilities, differences and disagreements, since issues related to family, marriage and human sexuality are perceived in quite different ways in different contexts.
- Invite church members to recognize different ways of shaping and sustaining responsibilities in family, marriage and other relationships, and not to make absolute certain forms given in one context as the only morally acceptable forms. Encourage them to examine the different forms, and consider the moral content of those different forms.
- Consider to what extent special elements or practices related to family, marriage or human sexuality can be an obstacle to our salvation, or to life in communion, given our belief that we are all sinners who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

Further, we suggest:

- Affirm that human sexuality is God-given and good. Accordingly, continue to develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how this gift can be safeguarded in a responsible manner within responsible relationships.
- Consider the range of scientific results relevant for the understanding of human sexuality in general, and homosexuality more specifically.
- Reflect on the proposition that sexual orientation may not be up to personal and moral choice, but may be related to conditions prior to such choice.
- Consider sexuality within a broader framework of understanding the human being as a relational being that relates to others, and not only in terms of single acts that are evaluated in isolation. Hence, sexuality would be assessed with regard to how it serves and contributes to such relationships.
- Distinguish issues of sex (biological) from issues of gender (the cultural expression of the biological).

- Affirm that responsibility and mutuality are basic for how we shape and live in sexual (as well as family) relationships with others. Encourage churches: to address misuse of sexuality in terms of prostitution, pornography, promiscuity, trafficking, incest and other forms of sexual exploitation; to give more attention to these issues; and not to focus attention only on the issue of homosexuality.
- Consider to what extent living in a responsible and permanent relationship with another person of the same sex can be said to be, or not to be, in accordance with biblical values.
- Invite the churches in which homosexuality is not considered to be an issue, or is not talked about, to realize that the presence of Christian gays and lesbians is confronting the Church worldwide, and their churches, with the challenge of how to address the issue.
- Recognize all human beings, irrespective of sexual orientation, as created in the image of God. Invite churches in all parts of the world to consider if they exclude anyone from being recognized in this manner.
- Encourage churches to advocate for the dignity and the rights of those who risk being criminalized because of their sexual orientation.
- Continue the open, honest and self-critical talk about family, marriage and human sexuality. Ask to what extent the churches may have contributed to repression, and the silencing of such issues, thereby not contributing to the development of an open attitude toward these matters. It is important that churches continue to provide a space for addressing these matters in a pastoral context.
- Encourage churches to continue reflecting on their pastoral responsibility in response to a wish expressed by some people for a ritual for their committed partnership, without entering into marriage.
- Given the seriousness of the issues of homosexuality, encourage the churches not to disregard either the issues or the presence of gays and lesbians within the Church. At the same time, encourage the churches not to push their own ways of dealing with these issues too strongly within the Communion, and to continue consulting with each other.

With the background of this report – including findings from material submitted by the member churches and suggested guidelines for processes and dialogue – the Task Force recommends that the LWF member churches continue to consult on these issues for a period of five years. There should be consultations across regional and national borders and, if possible, some form of interim reporting to the Council during that period.

**APPENDIX:**

The Task Force suggests the following general guidelines for the continuation of respectful dialogue on the issues of marriage, family and human sexuality.

***Recognize that conflict can be difficult***

We all must realize that conflict can be difficult – and might result in the ending of relationships, shouting matches or “the silent walk off.” Arguing different positions can lead to difficult strained relationships, and strong emotions can spill over. One might feel anger, fear, indignation, impatience or resentment, or become distraught or hopeless. These emotions tend to stimulate competitive responses.

Conflict can be especially difficult within the Church, because one or both sides often believe God is on their side.

***Recognize conflict as an opportunity for dialogue***

At the same time, one might also see conflict as an opportunity to dialogue about important differences, strengthening each other’s understanding, and to solve problems so that all may walk away being enriched by the engagement.

By entering such a dialogue, respect for the other is required, leading to acknowledgement of the *merit* of the other’s thoughts, feelings and actions and treatment of the other person as a *colleague*.

***Interest-based negotiation***

Realizing that we all have needs, two opposing groups can enter into “interest-based negotiation” in the following way.

- Ask each person to answer briefly and without interruption: “From your perspective, what are your *concerns* and how are they affecting you?”
- Listen for the *concerns* of the speaker.
- When the speaker is finished, repeat each concern.
- List the concerns on a wallboard or a large sheet of paper, under a heading for the speaker’s group or party.
- Repeat until all have spoken about their concerns once. (If the group is too large, select representatives to speak, while the rest of the group can listen.)
- You now have two lists of concerns. Further clarification is needed if both parties are to develop greater understanding.
- The following clarification questions are helpful for both parties to respectfully ask each other. These are open-ended questions.
  - i. Tell me more about ...
  - ii. Help me understand what’s important to you.
  - iii. Help me think about ...
- Based on your mutual new understandings, you can each identify each other’s particular interests (what you each need in order to move forward.)

- Brainstorming is the last step before commitment or agreement. The task is for both parties to think together of as many options as possible (write on the wallboard) that meet both interests.<sup>5</sup>

***Attitudes for respectful dialogue***

A committed approach to dialogue within and among churches and church members should also include the following.

- Practicing prayerful deliberation and openness to the Holy Spirit.
- Practicing honesty and self-criticism as persons as well as churches.
- Working with the awareness of our common dependence on the grace of God as sinners – as well as our commonality as God’s children.
- Allowing for, and trying to encourage humor, play and trustfulness in our interactions – by trusting that God is greater than our efforts to understand God.
- Recognizing and affirming that there is no shame in talking another position or changing your mind.
- Trusting that God will guide us.

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<sup>5</sup> The above resources on dialogue are based on Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes : Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*, 2nd ed. (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1991).; Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, *Beyond Reason : Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (New York: Viking, 2005).and “Interest-Based Mediation” as codified in Neb.Rev.Stat, §25 and practiced by 6 Nebraska Supreme Court approved Community Mediation Centers.

## **PROPOSAL FOR PRESENTATION OF SUGGESTIONS FROM THE TASK FORCE**

Regarding biblical and theological perspectives:

- Invite church members to read the Scriptures in light of their central message – salvation in Jesus Christ and justification by grace alone – and to address the issues and potential disagreements in question from that perspective.
- Consider carefully the question: *Why* does the Bible say what it does? – not only *what* it is saying.
- Realize that diversity in opinions on matters of practices and conduct is apostolic in the sense that diversity has been evident since the times of the New Testament and the beginning of Christianity (see Acts 15).
- Relate to other positions on the ecumenical scene, and develop the Lutheran position in relation to other churches and organizations, as well as in accordance with our own Lutheran theological heritage.
- Respect the principle of free conscience so that no one is forced to conform to practices that are contrary to what he or she finds biblically based.
- Affirm that human sexuality is God-given and good. Accordingly, continue to develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how this gift can be safeguarded in a responsible manner within responsible relationships.
- Consider to what extent living in a responsible and permanent relationship with another person of the same sex can be said to be, or not to be, in accordance with biblical values.
- Recognize all human beings, irrespective of sexual orientation, as created in the image of God. Invite churches in all parts of the world to consider if they exclude anyone from being recognized in this manner.
- Consider to what extent special elements or practices related to family, marriage or human sexuality can be an obstacle to our salvation, or to life in communion, given our belief that we are all sinners who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

Regarding social, cultural and scientific perspectives:

- Consider the range of scientific results relevant for the understanding of human sexuality in general, and homosexuality more specifically.
- Reflect on the proposition that sexual orientation may not be up to personal and moral choice, but may be related to conditions prior to such choice.
- Consider sexuality within a broader framework of understanding the human being as a relational being that relates to others, and not only in terms of single acts that are evaluated in isolation. Hence, sexuality would be assessed with regard to how it serves and contributes to such relationships.
- Distinguish issues of sex (biological) from issues of gender (the cultural expression of the biological).
- Affirm that responsibility and mutuality are basic for how we shape and live in sexual (as well as family) relationships with others. Encourage churches: to address misuse of sexuality in terms of prostitution, pornography, promiscuity, trafficking, incest and

other forms of sexual exploitation; to give more attention to these issues; and not to focus attention only on the issue of homosexuality.

- Encourage churches to advocate for the dignity and the rights of those who risk being criminalized because of their sexual orientation.

Regarding contextual and process perspectives:

- Consider that, within these issues, there exist incompatibilities, differences and disagreements, since issues related to family, marriage and human sexuality are perceived in quite different ways in different contexts.
- Invite church members to recognize different ways of shaping and sustaining responsibilities in family, marriage and other relationships, and not to make absolute certain forms given in one context as the only morally acceptable forms. Encourage them to examine the different forms, and consider the moral content of those different forms.
- Invite the churches in which homosexuality is not considered to be an issue, or is not talked about, to realize that the existence of Christian gays and lesbians is confronting the Church worldwide, and their churches, with the challenge of how to address the issue.
- Continue the open, honest and self-critical talk about family, marriage and human sexuality. Ask to what extent the churches may have contributed to repression, and the silencing of such issues, thereby not contributing to the development of an open attitude toward these matters. It is important that churches continue to provide a space for addressing these matters in a pastoral counseling context.
- Encourage churches to continue reflecting on their pastoral responsibility in response to a wish expressed by some people for a ritual for their committed partnership, without entering into marriage.
- Given the seriousness of the issues of homosexuality, encourage the churches not to disregard either the issues or the presence of gays and lesbians within the Church. At the same time, encourage the churches not to push their own ways of dealing with these issues too strongly within the Communion, and to continue consulting with each other.
- Continue to work and live and share together, in order to learn from each other and mature in the insights concerning the questions discussed, realizing that the differences are not to be overcome in the foreseeable future.