

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

*For Study and Response
Prior to November 1, 2008*

Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Church in Society
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

March 2008

Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality

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Information About This Draft

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is preparing a social statement on human sexuality to be considered by the Churchwide Assembly in 2009.

This document is the *draft* of that social statement and it will be revised following discussion throughout this church. There are several ways to participate in that process:

Study, discuss, comment: You are invited to study, discuss, and comment on this draft and thereby contribute to the development of the proposed social statement for 2009.

Participate in a hearing: You are also invited to attend hearings on this draft to be held in various synods.

The deadline for submitting comments is **November 1, 2008**. Information on how to respond, on hearings, and on ordering additional copies, may be found at the back of this booklet.

What is a draft social statement?

This document was prepared by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. It represents the task force's initial attempt to formulate a social statement. As such, it is intended to encourage deliberation on what this church should say about human sexuality.

This draft represents the best thinking of the task force to date, although not all task force members agree with all aspects of this document.

Broad response to it is vital to the process of writing the social statement and central to the life of this church. Responses to the document will inform the task force's work on the proposed social statement for 2009.

In preparation for this draft, the task force has published three congregational studies and a youth resource in the Journey Together Faithfully series. All of them may be downloaded from the Web site at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney or ordered from Augsburg Fortress (call 800/328-4648).

What is a social statement?

ELCA social statements are theological and teaching documents that assist members in forming judgments on social issues. They offer a framework for moral discernment. They also set policy for this church, guide its advocacy, and aid its life as a public church. Social statements result from an extensive process of deliberation throughout this church, and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns, a statement adopted in 1997, describes what a social statement does in this way: "Their focus is most commonly on those ethical guidelines that mediate between very general moral affirmations and the detailed requirements of a particular situation."

Will this draft address the issue of rostering?

The task force was directed by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly to “specifically 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.” Specific recommendations of this kind, however, are not included in a social statement. The task force will bring recommendations on rostering to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in a separate document. Whatever recommendations the task force makes will be available in February of 2009.

The task force will also bring implementing resolutions to the 2009 Assembly attached to the proposed social statement. “Social statements include in their implementing resolutions instructions and recommendations on how their governing principles and directives are to be carried out by different parts of this church.” *Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns* (1997)

Leading a discussion of the draft social statement

The task force encourages thorough discussion of the draft social statement in order to receive the most thoughtful, relevant response possible from the church. Leaders may want to plan for two sessions, one to focus on the theological basis of the statement, and one to discuss the subsequent sections.

After each section, asking some of the following questions may help direct conversation:

- What are the strengths of this section?
- What are the weaknesses of this section?
- What has been left out that needs to be included?
- What advice do you have for the task force, keeping in mind that they are charged with writing a social statement for the whole church?

Preparing to lead the study discussion

Here are some things to keep in mind as you plan for the study and prepare to lead the sessions:

1. Keep in mind that discussing matters related to sexuality can be especially sensitive. Some participants in your group may have experienced a range of harmful effects from simple teasing to sexual abuse or violence. No one should be required to participate in conversations that are likely to cause them discomfort or trauma.
2. Invite people of all ages to the discussion. Invite people who are married and single, widowed and divorced, straight and gay, and single parents. Sometimes people need to be invited to feel welcome.
3. Leaders do not need to be a pastor. Discussion facilitators from within the congregation can be recruited and prepared.
4. Read and become familiar with the content of the entire draft before beginning study.
5. Be prepared to take some notes or assign a recorder to capture ideas and thoughts from the discussion. This may be especially helpful when you get to the Response Form found at the end of this booklet.

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Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Church in Society
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Living in God's amazing grace

Prepared by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, Church in Society

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Available online at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney

Ordering a copy

A single copy of the draft can be obtained without cost by downloading it from the sexuality studies Web site (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney) or by calling 800-638-3522 ext 2996.

Multiple copies may be ordered from Augsburg Fortress (call 800/328-4648.)

A Spanish translation will be available online as of June 1, 2008. Download it from the sexuality studies Web site (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney).

Sending your comments to the task force

You are invited to respond to the draft and send your comments to Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. You may use the response form at the back of this document or write your comments in letter or essay form. Please send them to the task force by November 1, 2008.

You may send your comments to:

Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Church in Society
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4190

Or e-mail them to faithfuljourney@elca.org

Or respond online (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney)

Participating in hearings

You are invited to participate in hearings on the draft to be held in most synods.

Information and dates for these hearings will be posted on the Web site.

Please visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney.

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

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Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

I Introduction

Invited to answer the question, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40). Christians respond to these commands in the confident hope that by God’s grace alone we are set free for lives of worship and service.

This social statement addresses the question: What does it mean for us as sexual creatures to love our neighbors as ourselves and thus fulfill God’s law of love in this time and society? (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14; 6:14). Answering this question in a way that adequately and faithfully addresses the complex personal and social issues around human sexuality is as much a challenge today as it ever has been.

This social statement addresses the question: What does it mean for us as sexual creatures to love our neighbors as ourselves and thus fulfill God’s law of love in this time and society?

The past six or seven decades have seen immense changes in every aspect of human life, including human sexuality.¹ It is precisely in such times of change and uncertainty that our Lutheran heritage, grounded in Scripture, allows us to speak humbly yet boldly. At such times, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America especially can cherish its identity as a community of moral deliberation.²

This social statement on human sexuality responds to this church’s call for a foundational framework³ that will help it discern what it means faithfully to follow God’s law of love in the increasingly complex sphere of human sexuality. It does not offer once-and-for-all answers for all contemporary questions. Rather it taps the deep roots of Scripture and the Lutheran witness for specific Christian convictions, themes, and wisdom. It proposes guideposts to direct this church’s discernment as it strives to be faithful. It provides mark-

33 ers by which individual and communal decisions can be tested under the Spirit's guid-
34 ance. It seeks to describe the social realities of this age and to address them pastorally.
35 Insofar as it is possible, it also seeks to speak in ways that can address both religious and
36 secular discussions.

37

38 This church recognizes that many Christians, including ecumenical partners and other
39 Lutheran churches throughout the world, are deliberating matters of human sexuality.
40 This social statement strives to be mindful of those relationships. It speaks from a spirit
41 of humility and openness, welcoming continued dialogue and engagement with all others
42 about these challenging matters.⁴

43

44 This social statement serves several important functions for the ELCA simultaneously.
45 First, it is a teaching document. As such, Section II contains important introductory mate-
46 rial designed to explain how Lutherans approach ethics in the light of God's incarnation
47 and our hope in God who justifies us in Christ. Only after having discussed these funda-
48 mentals does the statement address the subject at hand.

49 Section III describes God's gift of sexuality in creation.

50 Section IV then investigates how trust among human be-
51 ings forms the basis of healthy relationships, including

52 sexual relationships. Finally, Section V discusses how social trust fosters healthy sexual-
53 ity in community life.

54

55 This statement professes that the Triune God accepts and redeems humankind and rec-
56 onciles the creation in Christ. This belief grounds the affirmation that God has lovingly
57 created all humans as sexual—and therefore relational—beings. Because we are sinful,
58 we constantly turn away from our relationship with God and therefore from the good of
59 the neighbor and society. In our daily living we are thus rightly constrained and guided by
60 the wisdom of the law, which protects us and society from harm. It is only through God's
61 grace through Jesus Christ that our relationship with God is made right.

62

63 God's grace sets Christians free to reflect God's abiding and unconditional love for us
64 through responsible lives that seek the good of the neighbor and the world. We do this be-

God has lovingly created all humans as sexual—and therefore relational—beings.

65 lieving that God is faithful to us and that we can trust God’s sure promises. In the realm of
66 human sexuality we are called not only to demonstrate this same trustworthiness in our rela-
67 tionships with one another, but also to strive to make this world a more trustworthy place.

68
69 Confident in the Spirit’s calling to this task, this church embarks on this vital work. This
70 church turns in hope to the witness and wisdom of Scripture, to its Confessions, and to its
71 heritage of theological reflection in order to:

- 72 • proclaim anew our unity in Christ that anchors our trust in the good that God promises;
- 73 • live boldly and humbly as people of hope in our relationships and in the world;
- 74 • seek understanding to guide reflection and to bring comfort to people living in to-
75 day’s complex world;
- 76 • develop the critical insight needed to evaluate social forces that affect how human
77 choices regarding sexuality are made; and
- 78 • renew this church’s commitment to address society in the confidence that God is at
79 work bringing redemption to the whole creation.

81 **II Theological and ethical foundations for** 82 **understanding sexuality**

83
84 We are all sexual creatures. The Bible makes clear that our
85 sexual nature is both a blessing and a source of vulnerabil-
86 ity. Human history confirms this. Sexuality can be wondrous and wounding, delightful
87 and destructive, satisfying and confusing. The experience of human sexuality can be all
88 these things, sometimes at the same time. No matter how a person experiences it, how-
89 ever, sexuality is integral to what it means to be human.

90
91 How then shall we understand the meaning and purpose of this complex blessing? How
92 shall Christians understand what it means to be faithful in the sexual dimension of our
93 lives so that we may learn to please God and benefit the neighbor⁵ in all ways?

94
95 This section begins to address these questions by affirming God’s incarnation in the very
96 midst of human life and confesses our justification for the sake of Christ, our Savior. It

How shall Christians understand what it means to be faithful in the sexual dimension of our lives so that we may learn to please God and benefit the neighbor in all ways?

97 explores how these foundational convictions shape the entire Christian understanding of
98 life, including our ethics and understanding of human sexuality. It reminds us that we live
99 in this world humbly and boldly as people of hope, confident in the resurrection of the
100 Christ crucified. We ground our ethics in Scripture and the living voice of the gospel.

101

102 ***Incarnation, justification and serving the neighbor***⁶

103 Our faith is an embodied, incarnate faith. In God’s actions of creation, incarnation, and
104 promise for the resurrection of the dead, we know our bodies to be valued by God and
105 included in the promised restoration of creation. (Colossians 1:19-20) Through Scripture
106 we encounter God’s promises made flesh in Jesus Christ. Through the sacraments, we
107 experience the power of the physical and tangible signs of water, bread, and wine. These
108 earthly elements convey God’s promises to us and bind us together in the Body of Christ,
109 the Church, present and active in the world today.

110

111 Because God cares about bodies, we do also—both our
112 own and our neighbors’. Because God cares about our
113 sexuality, we do also. Because God seeks us in love, we
114 seek relationship with others. Although sexuality is only
115 part of our entire experience as people, it is an important
116 and integral part, both individually and socially.

In God’s actions of creation, incarnation, and promise for the resurrection of the dead, we know our bodies to be valued by God and included in the promised restoration of creation.

117

118 This church believes that God “became truly human” and entered wholly and fully into
119 history. John 1:14 reminds us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of
120 grace and truth.” Therefore, no matter how deep the sinfulness of the world may be, his-
121 tory and creation are neither lost nor hateful to God. This includes human sexuality. Nei-
122 ther “bodiliness” (including bodily desire) nor materiality (all of creation) rightly can be
123 equated with evil or sin.⁷ This understanding of the incarnation has specific implications
124 for Christian ethical reflection about human sexuality and our being as sexual creatures.

125

126 In our understanding of God’s incarnation and our recognition of the amazing gift of our
127 bodies, Lutherans do not ignore or underestimate the brokenness of our relationships to
128 God or to each other. As Lutherans, we do not turn away from the sinful realities of the

129 world or of our own actions, however difficult or painful they may be. A Lutheran di-
130 agnosis of the human condition is very realistic. We all are entangled in sin and turned
131 in on ourselves. We constantly seek our own self-gratification and self-promotion at the
132 expense of others. In short, we turn away from God and in so doing, also turn away from
133 the good of our neighbor.

134

135 We do not despair, however, because we are justified through God's grace. God accepts
136 and redeems humankind and reconciles the creation in Jesus Christ, who was crucified
137 and is risen. This is the very center of our faith. Christians understand that through the
138 life, crucifixion, and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, God seeks to gather everything
139 in love (John 3:16-17). It is therefore as people who know ourselves to be simultaneously
140 sinful and justified that we seek to live faithfully.

141

142 Both the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther emphasized the important role of the law to
143 reveal to us God's intentions and promises for our lives, and to constrain, support, and
144 guide us in daily living.

145

146 Luther described two functions of the law, one political or *civil* and the other *theologi-*
147 *cal*. The *theological* use of the law reveals sin, confronting us when we have broken
148 our relationship with God and driving us to the forgiveness offered in the gospel. The
149 *civil* use of the law provides order in society so peace and justice are maintained in this
150 imperfect world. Thus, the law protects from harm all those whom God loves, particu-
151 larly the most vulnerable.⁸

152

153 When we honestly examine the extent to which we are ensnared—individually and
154 collectively—in patterns of self-serving, exploitation, abuse, and shame, we experience
155 the power of the theological function of the law to reveal to us the brokenness of our
156 relationship with God. Knowing that we can do nothing to bring about our own salvation,
157 Lutherans reject the notion that we can perfect either ourselves or society.

158

159 We dare to believe, however, that God forgives and accepts humankind in all its sinful
160 messiness, reconciling the whole of creation in the crucified and risen Christ, the Word

161 become flesh. Christians understand that through Christ, God seeks to embrace and rec-
162 oncile *everything* in this universe, including human sexuality.

163

164 As Christians, therefore, we experience at the same time both God’s grace and our own
165 sinfulness. As Lutherans we understand ourselves—individually and communally—as
166 *simultaneously* righteous (saved by God’s grace alone) and sinful (convicted by the law).
167 We live within the paradox that in our sexuality, as in other aspects of life, we always will
168 find both our own sinfulness and God’s grace.

169

170 Therefore, Lutherans also are ready to live within the
171 difficult, complex, and ambiguous realities in this world
172 because God calls us through the gospel to be there. In his
173 letter to the Galatians, Paul testifies that the foundation
174 of Christian identity is what God has done for us through
175 Christ. Luther echoes this affirmation in his treatise, “The Freedom of the Christian,”
176 claiming that Christians are radically freed by the gospel and thus profoundly responsible
177 to serve the good of the neighbor:

We live within the paradox that in our sexuality, as in other aspects of life, we always will find both our own sinfulness and God’s grace.

178 A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

179 A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.⁹

180 Luther believed that these two affirmations were the key to understanding the entirety of
181 Christian life in the world and this treatise, following Paul, spelled out an understanding
182 of Christian freedom as the basis for the Reformation’s understanding of Christian life
183 and ethics.¹⁰ Luther believed that this understanding of Christian freedom flowed from
184 the doctrine of justification as that which “preserves and guides all churchly teaching and
185 establishes our consciences before God.”¹¹

186

187 In other words, we are radically freed in Christ and we are called in that freedom to love
188 and serve our neighbor. It is only in the freedom from preoccupation with the self and
189 from the crushing burden of unworthiness before the perfection of God’s law that such
190 concern for the neighbor becomes possible.

191

192

193 This theological understanding of God’s incarnation and our utter dependence on God’s
194 grace, grounded as it is in Scripture, has crucial implications for Christian ethics (systematic
195 reflection on moral life) and moral discernment (careful thought seeking God’s guidance):

- 196 • In emphasizing that salvation is not a moral achievement, **Lutheran theology**
197 **teaches that salvation is not dependent upon human action.** Salvation is a
198 gift given to the undeserving and not a reward for morally approved behavior.
- 199 • In finding their ethical identity in justification, **Lutherans confess that our**
200 **freedom in Christ will engender responsibility and humility in service to the**
201 **neighbor.** We respond in gratitude to God’s love through care for the neighbor.
- 202 • In living out our responsibilities in a world infused with sin and yet embraced
203 by God, **our service of the neighbor takes place first and foremost in the**
204 **light of and in response to the neighbor’s true needs, often in complex and**
205 **sometimes tragic situations.** That is, we are called to love our neighbor based
206 not on the basis of abstract ideals, but on the concrete realities within which we
207 encounter our neighbors.

208

209 *Sexual ethics shaped by God’s mercy and compassion*

210 Christian life always is encircled by God’s grace, which
211 first occurred in granting life to the whole creation. God’s

212 grace provides sexuality to living creatures¹² and—in the midst of sin—redeems human
213 lives. Through grace we experience God’s promises, compassion, and mercy. These then
214 move us, in profound gratitude, to serve others through loving and responsible
215 actions. Because God is compassionate and merciful with us, we are called to be compas-
216 sionate and merciful with each other.

217

218 God’s compassion, which suffers with creation, points to God’s presence in the depths of
219 all human experience. Divine compassion and presence inspire us to walk with each other
220 in joy, humility, and tender care. God’s compassion is the ground of our own compas-
221 sion, our ability to empathize with others. At the same time, God’s gracious mercy meets
222 us even in our darkest moments and makes it possible for us courageously to confess our
223 brokenness and sin.

224

Because God is compassion-
ate and merciful with us, we
are called to be compassionate
and merciful with each other.

225 At heart, human beings are captive to sin—needy, fearful, often misguided, and some-
226 times broken. Unhappiness, isolation, ruptured relationships, distrust, anxiety—as expe-
227 rienced in sexuality—are ample evidence we need something other than laws and guide-
228 lines to free us from this captivity.

229

230 Beyond the need for the law to order society, human beings need God’s total demand—
231 God’s law—to unravel our confident belief that we can set things right, especially if
232 others will just yield control into our hands. We require God’s gaze to break through our
233 self-protective tendencies that seek to serve only ourselves
234 or to place blame on other individuals or groups. Paradoxically, we need God’s embracing mercy to alleviate our
235 despair and paralyzing fear about our own unworthiness.

God’s rescuing mercy, which
frees us from sin, does not
imply that how we live does
not matter.

237

238 Luther addresses our captivity to sin and God’s merciful rescue of us in the Small Cat-
239 echism’s explanation to the second article of the Apostle’s Creed. The creedal confession
240 “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9) evoked for Luther the common notion of a secular lord’s
241 responsibilities for rescuing kidnapped subjects from evil powers. Thus, the entire ex-
242 planation encourages us to imagine Christ as a good prince, “a champion come to fight.”
243 This prince rescues us hostages from captivity to sin, death, and the power of the devil.
244 He does so by paying a ransom with his own life, so that we are now free to “belong to
245 him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him.”¹³

246

247 God’s rescuing mercy, which frees us from sin, does not imply that how we live does not
248 matter. Indeed, deep gratitude for God’s mercy dramatically shifts our basic approach
249 to our life and the lives of others, including our approach to betrayal, abandonment, and
250 discrimination in sexual relationships. The power for new life comes from God.

251

252 God’s merciful compassion patterns Lutheran sexual ethics in important ways:

253 • **The power of God’s gracious love is both transforming and renewing.** The
254 good news of our justification by God through Christ alone, despite the depth
255 of our sinfulness, moves us to practice the same mercy and compassion that
256 we have experienced from God. In so doing we come to understand that the

257 human heart often responds best to love and honesty. Love in a fallen world is
258 a demanding and complicated calling. However the good news of Jesus Christ
259 reveals that the transforming and renewing power of God’s love brings hope,
260 healing, and new life to even the most challenging circumstances. We believe
261 that we can pursue good even in a fallen world.

262

263 • **The recognition of God’s mercy enables us to value the teaching of the law**
264 **and not to fear its consequences.** God’s mercy paradoxically frees us to ac-
265 knowledge the need for the law to protect self, neighbor, and society from harm.
266 We find in the law the wisdom of God and the legacy of insight from generations
267 before us. It provides structure for the weak, the inexperienced, the anxious, and
268 those living in recovery. The law keeps us anchored against the tempting but pow-
269 erful societal currents that feed our formidable powers of rationalization.

270

271 When law is exercised without gospel, however, it can lead to legalism, notably
272 in matters of human sexuality. An ethics focusing only on rules, dangers, prohi-
273 bitions, and duties has distinct limits. Lutheran sexual ethics cannot limit itself
274 to lists of right or wrong deeds (though some deeds are, indeed, right or wrong).
275 It also must not suggest that sexual longing or sexual expression is sinful intrin-
276 sically. In response to God’s love for humankind, Lutheran ethics continually
277 seeks to reflect the mercy and compassion of God. Lutheran sexual ethics seeks
278 the true needs of the neighbor and responds with mercy, compassion, and love.

279

280 • **God’s justification through Christ creates Christian vocation.** That is, as
281 we are forgiven in Christ (justification), we are freed to live lives committed to
282 loving our neighbor (vocation). In serving one another, Christians operate within
283 callings of responsibility such as work, parenting, singleness, or marriage. Such
284 callings have structures—or configurations of responsibilities—that guide us in
285 service to the neighbor.

286

287 Human sexuality is not a privilege or private right to be possessed or exploited
288 for personal gratification. By freeing us from the need to justify ourselves, God

289 did not set us loose to do whatever we please. Rather God called, claimed, and
290 sent us to bear God’s mercy to our neighbors and the world. Concern for the
291 neighbor requires an array of responsible actions, individual as well as social. In
292 response to God’s gracious love for us, we are called to action that requires criti-
293 cal and careful thought about what pleases God and serves the neighbor.

- 294
- 295 • **Christian life is a work of the Holy Spirit through the people of God.** Our
296 justification in Christ occurs as the Holy Spirit makes us part of a community of
297 believers.¹⁴ In this community we experience forgiveness of sins, life, and salva-
298 tion through Word and sacraments.

299

300 The Holy Spirit knits us into community: a peo-
301 ple who trust with assurance that we are forgiven
302 and freed because we belong to Christ. Our first
303 calling as ambassadors for Christ is not to judge
304 others but to testify to God’s costly reconcilia-
305 tion for the world (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). The
306 defining gifts of the Holy Spirit—faith, hope, and
307 love—are powerful guides into a life of healthy
308 sexuality, and bring healing promise to those who are harmed.

This ethic is more about direct-
ing us to find a responsible
place for sexuality in the ser-
vice of God’s ongoing activity
in the world than about con-
taining the ambiguous power of
sex. Reluctant to judge on the
basis of our own righteousness,
we are bold to construct social,
political, and community prac-
tices that will build trustworthy
relationships.

309

310 A Lutheran sexual ethic deeply attuned to justification and incarnation extends well beyond
311 the application of static principles, even biblical ones, to varying situations. This ethic is
312 more about directing us to find a responsible place for sexuality in the service of God’s
313 ongoing activity in the world than about containing the ambiguous power of sex. Reluctant
314 to judge on the basis of our own righteousness, we are bold to construct social, political, and
315 community practices that will build trustworthy relationships. A Lutheran sexual ethic looks
316 to the death and resurrection of Christ as the source for the values that guide it.

317

318 *Living as people of hope*

319 As sexual beings freed by Christ through God’s merciful and saving grace to serve our
320 neighbor, we are called to live boldly as people of hope in relationships and in the world.

321 We look to the resurrection of Christ as the assurance of God’s promised future for the
322 entire creation. This is a future of wholeness and restoration for which—as Paul confess-
323 es in Romans 8:18-25—all creation groans.

324

325 Christians believe that God’s promised future is the transformation of the whole creation.
326 This promise is revealed to us in God’s resurrection of the crucified Christ.

327

328 Guided by this vision, Christians pursue an ethic that anticipates and lives out the values
329 of God’s promised future concretely in the present. Empowered by this biblical vision we
330 find the confidence to seek the good of all our neighbors even—or perhaps especially—in
331 times of change and controversy.

332

333 Even as we confess Christ crucified and risen, Christians
334 recognize that salvation is not yet fulfilled; that is, God has
335 not yet brought creation to its intended completion. Chris-
336 tians live by and in this tension of *already, but not yet*.

As sexual beings freed by Christ through God’s merciful and saving grace to serve our neighbor, we are called to live boldly as people of hope in relationships and in the world.

337 The *already* promised in the resurrection is the basis of
338 the hope that gives meaning to Christian lives in the present, where we dare to live fully
339 because of the anticipated promise of the resurrection.

340

341 The biblical vision of God’s future grants meaning for the present by showing us who we
342 are and who we are to become. Humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26)
343 for intimate communion with God. Yet, Paul tells us that the fullness of our creation in the
344 divine image is not a reclaiming of the past. Rather, it is our destiny. It is ahead of us in
345 the resurrection to come (1 Corinthians 15:49). Our destiny is in the pattern of the Christ
346 rather than in the pattern of Adam. (Romans 5:12-21; Colossians 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians
347 15:49).

348

349 Nor is our destiny simply an individual resurrection. Rather, Christ’s resurrection contains
350 a promise that includes the fullness of all relationships, both personal and social. Scrip-
351 ture pictures a new heaven and new earth as a community of love for God and each other
352 (Revelation 21:1-5a).

385 in 1525, in the midst of great personal and societal uncertainty, gives us a good example
386 of such bold hope-filled living.¹⁶ We live, then, anticipating God's future by seeking to
387 improve relationships in this world, making it a more trustworthy place to live.

388

389 *Scripture and moral discernment*

390 The primary source for distinctively Christian insight
391 is Scripture. It is the authoritative source and norm of
392 this church's proclamation, faith and life.¹⁷ The quest for
393 understanding requires Christian communities to let the
394 word of Christ dwell in them deeply so that whatever they
395 do in word or deed may be done in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:16-17). As
396 Luther claimed, Scripture is the very cradle which holds the Christ Child. The words of
397 Scripture reveal and carry the living Word to us. Lutherans read the Bible to encounter a
398 living Christ. Through Scripture and sacrament, the living presence of Christ continues to
399 be revealed today.

We live, then, anticipating
God's future by seeking to
improve relationships in this
world, making it a more trust-
worthy place to live.

400

401 As the basis for Christian ethics, Scripture functions as both law and gospel to reveal
402 God's heart and the reality of the human situation. Scripture provides the Ten Com-
403 mandments, teaches the law of love and values the conscience. It also reminds Chris-
404 tians that they cannot discover God's intention for Christian morality simply by observ-
405 ing nature or the world. Scripture teaches that God's will for humankind and creation
406 can be comprehended only through the foolishness of the cross and resurrection of
407 Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).¹⁸

408

409 Lutherans understand that Scripture sometimes can be abused and misunderstood through
410 selective use as a moral guide. Bible verses once were used, for example, to justify
411 slavery. Scripture passages have been cited both by legalists and by those who seek to
412 live as if there is no need for law under the gospel.¹⁹ Particularly in the area of sexual-
413 ity, the Bible can be misused to support an ethics of legalism on one hand or an ethics of
414 relativity on the other. For this reason the Lutheran Confessions are particularly focused
415 on protecting the purity of the gospel and properly distinguishing God's promises from
416 God's commands.

417 Scripture cannot be used in isolation as the norm for Christian life and the source of knowl-
418 edge for the exercise of moral judgment. Scripture sheds light on human experience and
419 culture. At the same time, society’s changing circumstances and growing knowledge help
420 us to see how Scripture can speak to us. Scripture, especially in the law, must be interpreted
421 continually under the Spirit’s guidance within the Church and in thoughtful dialogue with
422 insights of culture and human knowledge.

423

424 The Lutheran tradition, then, is open to human knowl-
425 edge insofar as it encourages the good of the neighbor,
426 protects against harm, and does not make false claims
427 about God. In this light, human knowledge about sexu-
428 ality, such as that found in medicine and the social and physical sciences, can teach
429 us about healthy practice and provide new insights.

Lutherans understand that Scripture sometimes can be abused and misunderstood through selective use as a moral guide.

430

431 Faithful Christian discernment, however, continually calls for humility, intellectual rigor,
432 and careful reflection. This may be true especially with regard to the ethics of sexuality.
433 In this respect, the incarnation of Christ and the justification of the sinner as the starting
434 point for moral discernment provide both a guard and a guide.

435

436 **III Sexuality as part of God’s creative activity**

437

438 The deeply relational nature of the Triune God is profoundly evident in God’s gracious
439 and ongoing activity of creation. Our human bodies, including sexuality, are a gift from
440 God. In the accounts of creation, Genesis 1-2 testifies to God’s regard for humankind,
441 male and female. (Genesis 1:27-31) It also indicates God’s care for human loneliness
442 (Genesis 2:18), and God’s intended kindness in gendered bodies (Genesis 2:23-25). It is
443 all good, good, and very good!

444

445 In speaking of the gifts given in creation, Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “All
446 this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or
447 worthiness of mine at all!” The “all this” includes “body and soul and all their mem-
448 bers,” and thus includes our sexual natures. In the same place, Luther explains how God

449 provides “all the necessities and nourishment for this body” as well as protection in
450 danger and preservation from evil.²⁰ As Lutherans we believe that God actively allows
451 our sexual nature full, healthy expression and shields it from exploitation and calamity.

452

453 This section explores what it means to recognize that God created human beings to be in
454 relationship with one another as a holistic²¹ unity of spirit, mind, and body. Body, mind,
455 and spirit can be distinguished but not separated within the human being; God’s creative
456 and saving work embraces the entire human creature, including a person’s relationships.
457 Sexuality is one dimension of the whole human being that God loves so much that “the
458 Word became flesh” (John 1:14). It is both individual and also fundamentally social be-
459 cause that is how God makes and redeems all of us (John 3:16).

460

461 *The complexity of individual sexuality*

462 God created human beings to be in relationship with each other. The gift of sexuality
463 is vital to this intention. God continually blesses us, as holistic human creatures, with
464 diverse powers including powers for action, reasoning,
465 imagination, and creativity. Sexuality, as a dimension of
466 human life, includes such powers or capacities.

Body, mind, and spirit can be distinguished but not separated within the human being;...

467

468 Sexuality especially involves the power or capacity to form deep and lasting bonds,
469 the power to give and receive pleasure, and the power to conceive and bear children.
470 It includes the power to commit oneself to life with another, the capacity to touch
471 and be touched, and the power to love and be loved. Such powers can be used well or
472 badly. Such powers can serve God and serve the neighbor; they also can hurt self or
473 hurt the neighbor.

474

475 It is therefore a misunderstanding to think that sexuality is a matter of sexual or erotic
476 desire alone. Erotic desire, in the narrow sense, is only one component of the relational
477 human bonds that humans crave as sexual creatures. Although not all companionship
478 is sexual, at some level, all sexual relationship is about companionship. We need and
479 delight in companionship and are vulnerable to loneliness.

480

481 The need to share our lives with others is a profound good. The counsel to love and
482 care for the neighbor is not an alien demand that runs against our created natures; rather,
483 reaching out in love and care is part of who we are as sexual creatures. We need and want
484 the bonds and responsiveness of relationship.

485

486 The hunger for connection leads to joy when fulfilled, but it also renders human beings
487 susceptible to pain, isolation, and harm. The awareness of the vulnerability that is inher-
488 ent in trusting another can give rise to anxiety and fear.

489

490 Sexual love—the complex interplay of longing, erotic attraction, and self-giving—is a
491 wondrous gift, but does not by itself constitute a moral justification for sexual behavior.
492 This is so because the giving and receiving of love always includes mixed motives and
493 limited understanding.

494

495 American society often reduces the meaning of love to
496 infatuation or to “falling in love” or “making love.” A great
497 deal of damage, however, can be done in the name of such
498 love. This damage is often hidden or denied by such claims
499 as “love is the answer” and “as long as no one is hurt.”

Sexual love—the complex interplay of longing, erotic attraction, and self-giving—is a wondrous gift, but does not by itself constitute a moral justification for sexual behavior.

500 Jealousy, sexual affairs, possessiveness, domination, inter-
501 relational abuse, and the cultivation of a partner’s dependency are among the ways in which
502 “love” can become an excuse for damaging a partner. Self-deception, self-loathing, helpless
503 dependency, sexual affairs, and unwanted pregnancies are among the ways in which love
504 expressed immaturely and irresponsibly leads to harm.

505

506 Love and its troubles often have cascading consequences. Unplanned children born with-
507 out family support may result from love. Aging grandparents who take over the care of
508 abandoned grandchildren are bearing the costs of misguided love, although their care may
509 point to the deeper meaning of love. Children whose families break up after extra-marital
510 affairs may be damaged by such love. The bruises and broken bones of battered spouses
511 or partners are marks of the misuse of power and of a perverse love. Devastating diseases

512

513 can be transmitted and contracted through such love. Both suicide and murder can be
514 connected to relationships of love.

515

516 It often is suggested that what lies behind such damage is not really love, but “merely”
517 erotic attraction or physical gratification; this, however, ignores the power and complexity
518 of the human desire for companionship, for intimate relation with another, for belonging,
519 and for worth.

520

521 Such a response separates the body from the mind and spirit. Such division is inconsis-
522 tent both with contemporary secular knowledge of the complex interplay of body and
523 mind and with the biblical understanding of the human being as a unity of spirit, mind,
524 and body. The biblical narratives both rejoice in the splendor of sexual attraction (e.g.,
525 Song of Songs 4) and are candid about the evils of these human urges (2 Samuel 11; 2
526 Samuel 13).

527

528 *The social character of sexuality*

529 Sexuality is deeply social as well as spiritual and biological. The fact that human bodies
530 are a unity of spirit, mind, and body also means we are *located* in a particular natural and
531 social context. To be a human body is to be a concrete, particular person in “this place”
532 and “this time.” To be a holistic creature means being in a network of communities: a
533 family, a church, schools, civic groups, workplaces, and circles of friends. The individual,
534 the self, is deeply social and deeply shaped by these communities, even at the most
535 private and intimate moments.

536

537 Human sexual behavior is, to be sure, shaped by physical needs and biological drives.
538 Moreover, the failure to manage biological urges undoubtedly plays a role in some kinds
539 of sexual irresponsibility. These needs and drives are not all directed toward procreation,
540 although the desire for children can itself be a powerful motive. The urge for companion-
541 ship, the need for touch, and the desire for worth all are weighty factors at work in sexual
542 conduct. So are the desires for control and power and the urge to compete for status
543 within the group.

544

545 Given this reality, we must appreciate the profound influence of social forces and social
546 contexts on human sexual behavior. Some general moral practices seem to span historical
547 and cultural boundaries, but many also have been shaped by social location. What is ac-
548 ceptable sexual behavior in one social or historical context may not be acceptable in oth-
549 ers. Social forces, including economic ones, may lead people to make unhealthy sexual
550 choices. Sometimes damaging sexual behavior arises because social influences create and
551 give social legitimization to some desires and devalue others.

552

553 The social influence on sexuality can be deeply troubling. The encounter with beliefs and
554 practices of different communities—common in today’s pluralistic society—may lead to
555 conflict and uncertainty. In fact, however, an awareness of the social scope of sexuality
556 increases responsibility for ourselves and our communities. It moves us to understand
557 ourselves as responsible not only for our own actions but also for the social framework
558 that constrains or affects the choices of others.

559

560 In some ways, the discovery of the profound influence of
561 social forces on sexual choices can be a relief. For exam-
562 ple, parents of a teenage boy whose girlfriend is pregnant
563 can see that more than their parenting skills were at work
564 in their son’s life. A female pastor dealing with unwelcome touches from a male parishio-
565 ner can recognize that she did not provoke the harassment.

...we must appreciate the profound influence of social forces and social contexts on human sexual behavior.

566

567 This understanding of the social influence on sexuality broadens individual responsibil-
568 ity. It links what appear initially to be individual actions and troubles to larger social
569 challenges and social sin. Such insights can both facilitate individual understanding and
570 forgiveness and clarify the broader social issues that need to be addressed. They also
571 remind us that human failure and sin occur both in individual relationships and in the
572 broader society.

573

574 Like all human powers and capacities, sexual powers are blessings from God. They en-
575 able the individual and the social order to flourish. Yet, not one among us can claim to

576

577 have used these powers only in the service of goodness, faith, healthy relationships, and
578 service to the neighbor.

579

580 **IV Trust at the heart of faith active in love**

581

582 When the Lutheran Confessions discuss faith in God, they understand it fundamentally
583 as trust (*fiducia*) or absolute confidence in the promises of God.²² In faith we entrust our
584 whole lives to God. Because God is unfailingly true to God's promises, trust is at the core
585 of our relationship with God.

586

587 Trust is also at the core of what it means to be in right
588 relationship with the neighbor. Trust is therefore also at the
589 heart of faith active in love and justice. The creation and
590 maintenance of trust are both the foundation of healthy
591 personhood and the building blocks for healthy relation-

The creation and maintenance of trust are both the foundation of healthy personhood and the building blocks for healthy relationships between individuals.

592 ships between individuals. The ways individuals build trust with others and entrust them-
593 selves to each other vary according to different kinds of relationships.

594

595 Nowhere is trust more intimate, fragile, or crucial than in the sexual dimension of indi-
596 vidual lives. In what other dimension of our lives are we so clearly vulnerable to joy and
597 delight as well as to hurt and exploitation? From spiritual intimacy with God to the great-
598 est physical intimacy with another, relationships are measured by the depth and trustwor-
599 thiness of commitments.

600

601 Trust is central, also, in the functioning of a good society. It is essential for social institu-
602 tions and practices that affect or are affected by human sexuality such as the family, the
603 conduct of commerce, the practice of government, and community standards. The devel-
604 opment of social trust must be a central concern for Christians who seek the good of the
605 neighbor in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

606

607 As people of hope, God's people on earth are the keepers of a trust. God entrusts us with
608 the care of the neighbor and with the preservation of good social order enacted through

609 law. God in Christ “entrust[s] to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).
610 Within the assembly of Christians, the Holy Spirit forgives and, through that forgiveness,
611 continually creates a community of trust.

612

613 This freed community of hope is sent out to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and,
614 through faith active in love, to establish the kind of social and individual trust the world
615 needs. People who have entrusted their lives to God and committed their lives to the good
616 of their neighbors are responsible for cultivating love and trust and insisting on justice
617 and protection for others.

618

619 This section of the statement examines the central place of trust in all the relationships of
620 our lives as sexual creatures. It looks first at the importance of families and their particu-
621 lar responsibilities to ground and nurture trust, especially for children and youth. It con-
622 siders the role of trust in the sexuality of adults, in the roles of friendships, commitment,
623 and in the relationship of marriage. It concludes with attention to relationships involving
624 intimate sexuality outside of marriage and same-gendered relationships.

625

626 ***Strong families:²³ a ground and source of trust***

627 Lutherans understand that intimacy, trust, and safety, particularly for those most vulner-
628 able among us, are best sheltered within families. When safety and trust are eroded or
629 destroyed, the family becomes a dangerous or even demonic place where abuse can reign.
630 Thus Lutherans take great care to support whatever creates and sustains strong families as
631 a ground and source of trust.

632

633 Children learn either trust or distrust from their earliest relationships of dependence upon
634 parents and others in the family circle. Patterns of loyalty and confidence established in
635 the family can reach into all future relationships. Those who do not learn to trust face
636 significant obstacles to becoming trustworthy individuals or citizens in the more com-
637 plicated relationships of modern life and find it more difficult to develop a mature and
638 healthy sexuality.

639

640 The family, then, is the ground of trust because of the remarkable level of commitment

641 and care that characterizes familial bonds. While Scripture places family as secondary
642 to the community of God’s people (Matthew 10:37; 12:49), it also attests to the fam-
643 ily’s foundational role in protecting and nurturing human community (Exodus 20:12).
644 The Confessions recognize this role in such places as Luther’s commentary on parental
645 responsibilities in Luther’s catechisms.²⁴ It also recognizes the connection between
646 family and sexuality in its discussions of the commandments related to each.²⁵

647

648 Families must be regarded as an indispensable social institution because of their role in
649 establishing conditions of trust and protecting the vulnerable. As such, society properly
650 both regulates and shelters families through family law that exists to ensure that these
651 critical responsibilities will be met and that dependent family members will be protect-
652 ed and treated justly when households dissolve.²⁶

653

654 Social service ministries of this and other churches work to secure the well-being of fami-
655 lies in many ways. They give particular attention to those who have no family. They raise
656 their moral voice to affirm and celebrate the life-giving importance of familial covenants
657 of care. They teach others to embrace these callings of responsibility and love with care.

658

659 At the same time, realistic awareness of weakness and sin
660 prevents Lutherans from romanticizing family life or set-
661 ting up false ideals for household life. In particular, sexual
662 abuse or betrayal of promises and commitments within the
663 family constitute flagrant harm precisely because it oc-

Families must be regarded as an indispensable social institution because of their role in establishing conditions of trust and protecting the vulnerable.

664 curs within the context where trust should be most assumed. This church recognizes its
665 responsibility in congregations and through social ministry organizations to support its
666 members and others in all the difficulties that beset family life and to seek ways to ensure
667 and support the protection of the most vulnerable.

668

669 Many social trends²⁷ in the United States and elsewhere properly raise concerns about the
670 health of families as we move into the twenty-first century. While these trends involve indi-
671 viduals who have personal responsibility for their choices, they also are driven by economic
672 and social forces that are both complex in origin and significantly resistant to correction.

673 In this country the legally married, heterosexual "nuclear family" has been supported by
674 strong social conventions throughout the twentieth century.²⁸ As such, it is well-struct-
675 tured to foster the development of trust in children and youth. The experience of millions
676 of people and recent social science findings demonstrate its inherent abilities for doing
677 so.²⁹ This does not mean, however, that it has always done so effectively, for sometimes
678 the family has sheltered sexism, unjust economic arrangements, or domestic violence.
679

680 This church responds to the needs of families through its ministry and service in vari-
681 ous settings. It also has the task of addressing—or even advocating against—social and
682 economic trends that work against the development of strong families. While engaging in
683 these ministries and services, however, this church should remember that the critical issue
684 with respect to the family is not whether it has a conventional form; in the midst of differ-
685 ent challenges, other familial arrangements also may fulfill these vital roles of providing
686 safety, shielding intimacy, and building trust.³⁰
687

688 Millions of households in the U.S. today are headed by
689 single parents, whether widowed, divorced, or never mar-
690 ried. Other households include foster and adoptive fami-
691 lies, blended families, families with a missing generation,
692 and families with same-sex parents. The central issue is
693 whether a family performs the indispensable personal and social tasks that families are
694 intended to accomplish. This church's first response toward all families should be one
695 of welcome and support that includes particular care for children, inviting them into the
696 community of the baptized regardless of their family situation.
697

The central issue is whether a family performs the indispensable personal and social tasks that families are intended to accomplish.

698 The family whose life is anchored by trust in God and faithful church practice is strength-
699 ened and empowered by that faith. Families also may strive for reasonable expectations,
700 willingness to forgive and seek forgiveness, and the responsible bearing of each other's
701 burdens. These qualities please God and, when learned in the context of a loving and
702 committed family, lead to mature and healthy expressions of sexuality. Moreover, when
703 trust has been betrayed in such a family, forgiveness, loving correction, and reconciliation
704 may be possible.

705 It is difficult for mutual trust and love to flourish amid the reality of great differences.
706 At this particular point in history, this church confesses with regret the way in which
707 Lutheran historical teachings concerning homosexuality sometimes have been used to
708 tear apart families with gay or lesbian members. A great deal of work remains. This in-
709 cludes theological reflection, giving critical attention to the findings of secular scientific
710 studies, and hearing the voices of those most affected. This church must work toward
711 more understanding of the varieties of sexual identities, seeking for that which is posi-
712 tive and life-giving while protecting from all that is harmful and destructive.

713

714 Society at large must ensure that relationships of dependency be protected and not
715 disrupted by social policies and practices. Even social institutions not directly related to
716 family institutions can and should facilitate and support familial care and responsibility.
717 Some social institutions, however, may place significant obstacles in the way. Examples
718 include tax and poverty law, real estate and zoning regulations, and insurance industry
719 policies and practices.

720

721 It therefore follows that the ELCA should support and
722 nourish familial relationships that are central to nurturing
723 and sustaining trust and security in human relationships.

This church commits itself to continued attention to and discernment about changing family configurations and how they serve to shelter and protect relationships.

724 This church commits itself to continued attention to and
725 discernment about changing family configurations and how they serve to shelter and pro-
726 tect relationships.

727

728 ***Protecting children and youth in and for trusting relationships***

729 A strong and healthy family is perhaps a person's greatest asset because such a context
730 nurtures growth, enhances trust, and offers protection. This is especially true for children
731 and youth as they grow into sexual maturity. Society plays a vital role both in supporting
732 families and in supplementing what they can offer.

733

734 Sexual safety is of overriding importance because the damage done to children and youth
735 through sexual abuse or molestation can be remarkably deep and lasting. Such harmful
736 behavior may include unwanted or inappropriate touching, seduction, exposure to por-

737 nography, lewdly exposing genitals to children or inducing children to do the same, and
738 the engagement by adults in genital relations with minors.

739

740 Criminal statutes prohibiting abuse and molestation contribute to the protection of
741 children and youth, and this church supports the prosecution of any individual who
742 commits a sexual crime against a minor. Further, this church affirms appropriate laws
743 requiring reporting of suspected child abuse to the authorities in order to prevent future
744 harm to those vulnerable minors who cannot protect themselves.

745

746 This church also recognizes that congregations and other ministry sites must continue in
747 their efforts to be safe places for all persons. Though much work has been done to help
748 congregations protect children, this church must continue to expand its efforts for protec-
749 tion of minors who participate in church-sponsored events and programs. This church
750 calls for the adoption of preventive measures including
751 educational programs, appropriate policies, and screening
752 of persons who care for, supervise, or work with children.

753

754 Matters of concern to both society and the church extend
755 beyond abuse and molestation to organized sexual ex-
756 ploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation is widespread
757 throughout the United States and around the world. It

758 continues to grow and involves surprising numbers of youth by taking advantage of their
759 vulnerabilities.³¹

760

761 This church strongly reaffirms its 2001 message, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation,”
762 which states, “Sexual exploitation in any situation, either personally or commercially,
763 inside or outside legally contracted marriage, is sinful because it is destructive of God’s
764 good gift [of sexuality] and human integrity.” This message notes that this is especially
765 true with respect to the demonic harm sexual exploitation visits on children and youth.³²

766

767 Children and youth today live in a highly sexualized world. They are exposed early to
768 patterns of adult sexuality and are pressured to think of themselves as sexual objects.

Sexual exploitation in any situation, either personally or commercially, inside or outside legally contracted marriage, is sinful because it is destructive of God’s good gift [of sexuality] and human integrity.

769 Examples include child beauty contests, sexually suggestive clothing for children, and
770 sexually charged prime time and cable television programs, which are watched by all
771 ages. At an early age, many children listen to strongly sexual music that is deliberately
772 marketed to them. They “date” as couples and engage in genital activity at earlier ages.
773 Children are targets of sexual bullying, destructive language, and vicious humor.

774

775 Although the long-term consequences of such activities are disputed, they raise serious
776 questions for this society. This church regards the over-exposure of emotionally matur-
777 ing children and teens to adult sexuality as a failing on the part of adults and society. It
778 challenges all actors and institutions in society to fulfill the responsibility to protect and
779 nurture children and youth and provide for their appropriate development.

780

781 In a consumer-driven society, parents sometimes feel helpless to offer the kind of pro-
782 tection they would like to provide. Children and youth are deeply influenced by media
783 that emphasize sex appeal. This is widely accepted even
784 though such sexualization of children and youth is often
785 identified as emotionally, physically, and spiritually dan-
786 gerous. It is a formidable challenge to counter the appeal
787 of popular culture in clothing, music, and the media. Nev-
788 ertheless, congregations can be forums in which parents
789 can express these concerns and explore solutions together.

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.

790

791 Expanding cyberspace creates new challenges for the protection of children and youth.
792 Some of the threats to the well-being of children and youth in this electronic world
793 clearly are criminal under existing law. The subtlety and disguises of sexual predators
794 and the secret cooperation of the victims, often naively, make these crimes hard to track
795 and prosecute.

796

797 Widespread electronic availability of violent and degrading pornography threatens chil-
798 dren and youth as well as adults. There is evidence that pornography has the capacity
799 to warp the normal sexual development of those who view it, often obsessively and in

800

801 secret. How to address this problem is one of the most important child-protection issues
802 of our time, and the church should be an important voice in that conversation.

803

804 The education of children and teens, including their sexual education, must be supported as
805 a priority by this church. Studies among teens seem to agree that few parents or congrega-
806 tions meaningfully engage young people in either sex education or healthy conversation
807 about sexuality, even though teens would welcome it. This lack of engagement is astonish-
808 ing, especially considering the dangers already discussed. This church must give particular
809 attention to how youth are supported, nurtured, and accompanied in their sexual and rela-
810 tional formation.

811

812 Toward that end, this church reaffirms what it has said previously about providing sex
813 education within the context of Christian faith.³³ Such education must begin early and
814 emphasize responsibility, mutuality, and abstinence. Such education, however, should
815 focus on sustaining conversation about what is good and
816 what is harmful as appropriate to a growing maturity
817 level. It should avoid simply requiring compliance with
818 approved or rejected behaviors, but should emphasize the
819 exploration of why some behaviors are damaging, why
820 and how some pressures should be resisted, and what differentiates mature and rewarding
821 sexual love from exploitative and demeaning forms.

This church must give particular attention to how youth are supported, nurtured, and accompanied in their sexual and relational formation.

822

823 It therefore follows that the ELCA reaffirms its interest in and responsibility for the
824 care and protection of vulnerable children and youth. It understands itself as called to
825 this mission in its various expressions and in the vocations of its members. Such voca-
826 tions involve all adults, both single and married, since all contribute to the well-being
827 of children and youth in untold creative ways. It understands that all children and
828 youth, both inside and outside the church, are deserving of this church's concern.

829

830 *Sexuality and self*

831 Both sexuality and trust are fundamentally relational. Appropriate care for and trust of the
832 body is part of living out the calling and freedom of a Christian.³⁴

833 Strong, healthy, and trusting relationships include confident, healthy, and responsible
834 people. We are gendered beings from the beginning of our lives. This means much more
835 than that we are born with male, female, or sometimes with ambiguous genitalia. Our
836 cells carry sex chromosomes. Our endocrine systems bathe the inner world of our bod-
837 ies in cascades of gendered hormones. And in ways that are still not fully understood, we
838 develop strong gender identities at a very early age.

839

840 Gender and sexuality are indelible features of our very being. Sexual capabilities and
841 experiences are part of life for all ages and physical abilities. One can experience the
842 sexual in music, art, literature, and the beauty of people and nature. One can take pleasure
843 in food, touch, sound, smells, and activities. One can find expression for the self and for
844 sexuality through the spoken word, touch, dance, music, and movement.

845

846 One does not need to be in a relationship to experience one's sexuality. Bodies do not
847 suddenly become sexual at puberty and do not cease to
848 be sexual when, for example, there are physical limita-
849 tions, menopause, erectile dysfunction, or the absence of
850 a sexual partner. This means that throughout our lives we
851 need to find life-enhancing and appropriate ways of giving
852 expression to this complicated dimension of ourselves. This is a delight, a perplexity, and
853 a challenge at all life stages and in all relational situations.

This church teaches that caring for the body and following practices that lead to physical and emotional wellness is a good thing.

854

855 We have sexual feelings that must be negotiated when we are interacting with friends,
856 courting a potential life partner, working closely with colleagues, or sharing our lives in
857 marriage. We also have sexual identities that will find expression in our lives. Moreover,
858 we must evaluate and respond constantly to the way in which the sexuality of others is
859 expressed. We must respond to sexual stimuli in the environment, including the variety
860 of human touch, which may vary from casual contact through flirtatious appreciation to
861 invitations to intense physical intimacy.

862

863 A healthy sense of sexuality is related to having a healthy body image. This church teach-
864 es that caring for the body and following practices that lead to physical and emotional

865 wellness is a good thing.³⁵ Having a positive sense of one’s own body supports a healthy
866 sense of one’s gender identity and sexuality. Mature, healthy individuals are comfort-
867 able with their bodily selves. They are able to entrust themselves to others without fear
868 or shame. They call frankly upon others to respect and honor their privacy, their bodily
869 integrity, and their wishes concerning welcome and unwelcome touch.

870

871 Physical, emotional, and relational wellness contribute to a lower incidence of at-risk
872 behaviors for all people, including youth.³⁶ There also is a growing understanding of the
873 significant, but often subconscious, influence that social expectations and practices can
874 have. Sexual feelings and behavior are not simply biological urges. They also are strongly
875 influenced by cultural factors and social pressures.

876

877 In some contexts, it can be very hard to develop and maintain positive attitudes about one’s
878 body. In the face of certain social pressures, it can be very difficult to avoid becoming ma-
879 nipulative and exploitative in one’s relationships. It can be
880 equally difficult for those who are being used by others to
881 recognize and defend themselves against exploitation.

Because we are all sexual creatures, friendship relations do have a sexual dimension in so far as they are related to our longing for human connection and the privilege and warmth of human touch.

882

883 This church is committed to affirming the value, beauty, and
884 health throughout life of the human body and human sexual-

885 ity. This church calls attention to the danger of embracing standards of physical attractiveness
886 that exclude many, including the aged, those who are differently abled physically, and which
887 distort the understanding of what it means to be healthy. A holistic understanding of the inter-
888 relationship of body, mind, and spirit challenges this narrow understanding of beauty. Such
889 a holistic understanding enables us to better affirm the many dimensions of beauty and to
890 celebrate human variety and particularity.

891

892 *Gender and friendships*

893 This church also calls attention to the immense value of friendship for persons in all
894 stages of life. Friendships, community and workplace relationships are spheres of human
895 life in which bonds and companionship can and do flourish. They are also places where
896 trust and distrust mix in complicated ways.

897 Because we are all sexual creatures, friendship relations do have a sexual dimension.
898 They are expressive of our longing for human connection and the privilege and warmth of
899 human touch. Friendships enrich the lives of persons when they are young and old, living
900 independently and married, caring for aged parents and caring for young children.

901

902 Lutheran congregations in the United States have a history of fostering many kinds of
903 friendship circles such as women’s groups, choirs, social service events and study ses-
904 sions. As members experience growing demands upon their time, some of these networks
905 of friendship may become frayed. More could be done at both congregational and synodi-
906 cal levels to afford opportunities for friendships to develop and thrive within the Christian
907 community.

908

909 Sometimes friendships become sexual in the narrower sense of giving rise to overtly
910 erotic impulses and stimulation. Erotic interest between adults open to romantic relation-
911 ship can be a desired part of the growth of trust and intimacy.

912

913 Erotic interest can also create conflicts and danger. These
914 have to be faced honestly when one or both of the persons
915 involved have already made promises of fidelity to another.

916 These have to be recognized, also, whenever one of the
917 involved persons does not welcome a deeper and more

918 complicated closeness. Reintroducing distance into such

919 friendships or breaking them off represents an acceptance of loss that requires courage
920 and maturity. The violation of trusting relationships for sexual purposes is offensive, un-
921 acceptable, and when criminal, should be punished accordingly. This includes the viola-
922 tion of friendship through “acquaintance rape.”

923

924 Communities of faithfulness enable us to appreciate and respect the needs and desires
925 of others, and they uphold us in the sometimes costly responsibility of keeping prom-
926 ises. Congregations and ministry settings of this church should strive to be these kinds
927 of communities.

928

Communities of faithfulness both enable us to appreciate and respect the needs and desires of others and uphold us in the sometimes costly responsibility of keeping promises.

929 In the workplace, supervisors, coworkers, professionals, and clients must also negotiate
930 complex relationships. The sexual dimension of these relationships, both in the general
931 sense and in the sometimes more specifically erotic sense, needs to be honestly recog-
932 nized. This dimension requires appropriate boundaries that are defined through respect,
933 good sense, workplace policies, and legal protections. In this employment setting, sexual
934 harassment is not only offensive and disruptive, but may violate the civil law.

935

936 Employers must pay particular attention to work relationships between colleagues, both
937 where there are power differentials, and where the workplace environment is rendered sexu-
938 ally offensive or hostile by the conduct of coworkers. This church encourages the adoption
939 and implementation of policies and practices designed to prevent and address sexual harass-
940 ment on the job. This church also remains committed to its own efforts to make congrega-
941 tions, synods and churchwide offices safe and healthy places to live and work.

942

943 This church holds high expectations for those individuals called to serve as rostered lead-
944 ers. This church does not tolerate the abuse of the ministerial office for personal sexual
945 gratification. Such violation results in profound injury to the victim of such misconduct,
946 the family of that person, to the offender, the family of the offender, and to the congre-
947 gation or ministry setting. Such abuse severely damages the credibility and trust of the
948 public ministry to which this church and its leaders are called.

949

950 *Commitment and sexuality*

951 As gendered, sexual creatures throughout life, people cultivate and manage relationships
952 along a spectrum that runs from casual associations to intense intimacy. The deepening
953 of trust and commitment is a lengthy process that requires deliberate attention and effort.
954 This fact provides a way of thinking about how people come to select life partners and
955 about their sexual conduct in that process.

956

957 Whether teenage, young adult, mature, or senior, couples move from a first acquaint-
958 tance into a continuing journey of increasing knowledge, appreciation, and trust in each
959 other. This journey involves spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical dimensions
960 of self-understanding. When these dimensions develop at similar rates, trust and en-

961 trusting are established and secured. When they are out of balance, trust may not exist,
962 or may disintegrate.

963

964 As trust and entrusting are established in a relationship, physical expression often be-
965 comes more intimate. That is, sexual intimacy often would be expected to follow the
966 same pattern of growth marked by the other dimensions of mutual self-understanding.

967

968 For this reason, this church teaches that degrees of physical intimacy should be carefully
969 matched to degrees of affection and commitment. This also suggests a way to understand
970 why this church has taught that the greatest physical intimacies, such as intercourse,
971 should be matched with and sheltered by the highest level of binding commitment, such
972 as found in marriage. It is in marriage that promises of fidelity and public accountability
973 provide the foundational basis and support for trust, intimacy, and safety, especially for
974 the most vulnerable.

975

976 This is also why this church does not support non-monog-
977 amous, promiscuous, and transient sexual relationships or
978 casual sexual encounters. Indulging immediate desires for
979 satisfaction, sexual or otherwise, is to “gratify the desires
980 of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

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

981

982 Such relationships undermine the dignity and integrity of individuals. In such situations,
983 physical intimacy does not accompany the growth of mutual self-knowledge. Absent the
984 presence of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual trust and commitment, such
985 relationships can damage the self and an individual’s future capacity to live out commit-
986 ted and trustworthy relationships. Such fleeting relationships misuse the gift of sexual
987 intimacy and are much more likely to be unjust, abusive, and exploitative.

988

989 While this church does not encourage such relationships, it insists that every sexual rela-
990 tionship entails responsibility. All sexually active people have the responsibility to protect
991 the other person from emotional as well as physical harm. All sexually active people have

992

993 a particular responsibility to protect themselves and their partners from sexually transmit-
994 ted diseases (STDs) and HIV.

995

996 ***Marriage***

997 Trust is a quality of relationship that, while never perfected, is nurtured and reinforced
998 over time. The trust and mutual reliance shared by two adults who are deeply committed
999 to each other is one of the most beautiful, abiding, and transformative forms of human
1000 relationship. The depth of care, matched to an intimacy of touch, creates relationships
1001 much stronger than simple and momentary erotic interest. Sexual intimacy matched with
1002 promises of fidelity and public accountability nurtures bonds that allow persons to flour-
1003 ish and provides a rich context through which new life may enter the world.

1004

1005 Marriage is a structure of mutual promises between a man and woman blessed by God
1006 (Mark 10:7-9) and authorized in a legal arrangement
1007 required by the state. Christians understand marriage as
1008 a covenant of commitment and hope requiring constant
1009 care and cultivation. It is a covenant that protects the
1010 creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as a foun-
1011 dation of human community. It is a binding relationship
1012 that provides conditions for personal well-being. Because
1013 of promises of fidelity and public accountability, mar-
1014 riage provides a context of love, trust, honesty, and commitment within which a couple
1015 can express profound joy of relationship as well as address the troubles that inevitably
1016 will come.

Christians understand marriage as a covenant of commitment and hope requiring constant care and cultivation. It is a covenant that protects the creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as a foundation of human community.

1017

1018 The purpose of marriage is not solely to legitimate genital relations, but to create long-
1019 term, durable communion for the good of others. It is a communion within which the play
1020 and delight of physical love are crucial expressions of the depth of trust and in which
1021 lovemaking is sensitive to the needs of the other. It also is a communion within which the
1022 conception of children is a cause for gladness. Lovemaking in marriage can be a tender
1023 and generous act of self-giving that tends to the joy and pleasure of the other.³⁷

1024

1025 The Christian commitment to marriage recognizes that sin enters all relationships, both
1026 within and outside the institution of marriage. All marriages fall short of intentions and
1027 difficulties are inevitable because of the frictions of learning to live together and the anx-
1028 ious concern for self that often is placed before the needs of the other.

1029

1030 Precisely because marriage is the place where deep human trust and needs abide, it also
1031 can be a place of greatest harm. Harming another through the misuse or abuse of power
1032 not only is a profound injury, but also a betrayal and violation of the shelter and trust that
1033 are intended within the marriage relationship.

1034

1035 Despite its awareness of the presence of sin and failures in marriage, the Christian tra-
1036 dition places great emphasis on the value of marriage. It is in marriage that the highest
1037 degrees of physical intimacy are matched with and protected by the highest level of bind-
1038 ing commitment. It is in marriage that public promises of lifetime commitment create the
1039 foundation for trust, intimacy, and safety.

1040

1041 The church's historical experience supports its confidence that solemn promises, made be-
1042 fore a company of witnesses who ask for God's blessing on a couple, have the power to cre-
1043 ate a unique framework in which two people, a new family, and the community may flour-
1044 ish. This church has confidence that such promises, which are supported by the contractual
1045 framework of civil law, can create a lifetime relationship of commitment and cooperation.

1046

1047 Both the intent of lifelong promises and the civil requirements for marriage are important.
1048 Mutual promises of enduring care and fidelity, made before God, allow a couple to open
1049 themselves to each other. They permit the sharing of profound and tender affection as
1050 well as deep vulnerabilities and anxieties. The legal contract creates a public arrangement
1051 within which a couple may safely and equitably share their assets and resources, arrive at
1052 joint decisions, protect and nurture children, and plan for a shared future.

1053

1054 ***Relationships involving intimate sexual relations outside of marriage***

1055 Speaking descriptively, many pastors and parents have come to recognize the contem-
1056 porary pressures that encourage adult cohabitation. When marriage is delayed, often for

1057 years beyond the age of physical sexual maturity, the pressures for physical intimacy may
1058 grow. Social trends in this society, such as extensive schooling, downward wage pressure,
1059 and even the desire for expensive weddings, also encourage that delay.

1060

1061 While some of these trends are the result of individual choices, many also are influenced
1062 by broad social forces. It also must be recognized that frequent failures of marriage, a
1063 general social acceptance of casual sex, widely available birth control, and the strong cul-
1064 tural influence of individualism lead many to question the need for—and sometimes even
1065 the rationale for—binding relationships.

1066

1067 In addition, certain laws and economic realities in this society create extreme economic
1068 hardship for many, including senior citizens, who desire to be legally married. This
1069 church calls for altering laws and the factors that create economic disadvantage for those
1070 who desire to enter into marriage.

1071

1072 This church does not favor or give approval to cohabitation arrangements outside of
1073 marriage. It has a special concern when such arrangements are entered into as an end in
1074 themselves. It does, however, acknowledge the social forces at work that encourage such
1075 practices. This church also recognizes the pastoral and familial issues that accompany
1076 these contemporary social patterns. In cases where a decision is made for cohabitation,
1077 this church expects its pastors and members to help the couple recognize a special obliga-
1078 tion to be clear and candid with each other about their plans, expectations, and levels of
1079 mutual commitment.

1080

1081 In entering cohabitation arrangements the couple also should consider that, as opposed to
1082 seeking marriage, choosing cohabitation can indicate resistance, consciously or unconsciously,
1083 to deeper or more permanent levels of commitment.

1084

1085 It should be noted that some cohabitation arrangements can be constructed in ways that
1086 are neither casual nor intrinsically unstable.³⁸ In earlier generations betrothal carried
1087 similar obligations to those of marriage. In certain situations, conventional or even legal
1088 obligations accompany cohabitation arrangements. In some states, for instance, there are

1089 still laws that govern “common law marriages.” Such arrangements may differ markedly
1090 from other more transitory and troubling forms of cohabitation.

1091

1092 The deepest human longings for a sense of personal
1093 worth, long-term companionship, and profound security,
1094 however, require binding commitments as the condition
1095 for any measure of satisfying fulfillment. This is
1096 especially true given the propensity to sin against
1097 the neighbor,

The deepest human longings for a sense of personal worth, long-term companionship, and profound security, however, require binding commitments as the condition for any measure of satisfying fulfillment.

1098

1099 It is for such reasons that this church urges the public proclamation and accountability of
1100 marriage. Marriage provides for the expectations and commitments of both partners to be
1101 explicitly stated and upheld both by communities of faith and the civil order.

1102

1103 *Same-gender committed relationships*

1104 This church recognizes that it is in relationships of life-long companionship and commit-
1105 ment with public accountability that both interpersonal and social trust may be nurtured.
1106 It is within committed binding relationships, lived out within community, that relational
1107 and physical intimacy may be expressed and may have the capacity to offer worth and
1108 value to society. This church understands and affirms that such relationships reflect God’s
1109 love for the world and the vocation to love the neighbor.

1110

1111 It is only within the last decades that this church has begun to deal in a new way with
1112 the longing of same-gender persons to seek relationships of life-long companionship and
1113 commitment and to seek public accountability for those commitments. In response, this
1114 church has drawn deeply on its Lutheran heritage to dwell in Scripture and listen to the
1115 Word of God. This listening has brought biblical scholars, theologians, and rostered and
1116 lay persons to different conclusions.³⁹ After many years of study and conversation, this
1117 church does not have consensus regarding loving and committed same-gender relation-
1118 ships. This church has committed itself to continuing to accompany one another in study,
1119 prayer, discernment, and pastoral care.⁴⁰

1120

1121 In such a situation this church draws on the foundational Lutheran understanding that
1122 the baptized are called to reflect God’s love in service to the neighbor. This social state-
1123 ment is grounded in the evangelical gratitude for the Lutheran tradition where with St.
1124 Paul we believe that, along with all other sinners for whom Christ died, we are made
1125 acceptable to God through the righteousness of Christ, not our own (Romans 3:21-26;
1126 5:1-11). In our Christian freedom to serve the neighbor and to make the world a more
1127 trustworthy place, we are called to seek responsible actions that serve others. This
1128 church, both those who regard same-gender sexual relationships as sinful and those
1129 who do not, calls for mutual respect in relationships and for guidance that seeks the
1130 good of each individual and of the community.

1131
1132 Although this church lacks consensus, it encourages all people to live out their faith in
1133 the community of the baptized. Following previous decisions of this church, we call on
1134 congregations to welcome,⁴¹ care for and support⁴² same-gender-oriented people and their
1135 families, and to advocate for their legal protection.⁴³

1136
1137 We believe that this church has a pastoral responsibility to all children of God. This
1138 includes pastoral response to those who are same-gender in their orientation and to those
1139 who are seeking counsel about their sexual self-understanding. We encourage all to avail
1140 themselves of the means of grace and pastoral care.

1141
1142 In their pastoral response, some pastors and congregations will advocate repentance and
1143 celibacy. Other pastors and congregations will call our same-gender-oriented brothers and
1144 sisters in Christ to establish relationships that are chaste, mutual, monogamous, and life-
1145 long. These relationships are to be held to the same rigorous standards and sexual ethics
1146 as all others. Further, they will encourage same-gender couples to model their relation-
1147 ships according to the teachings of the Small and Large Catechisms pertaining to the
1148 sixth commandment. This suggests that dissolution of a committed same-gender relation-
1149 ship be treated with the same gravity as the dissolution of a marriage.

1150
1151 This church recognizes the historic origin of the term “marriage” as a life-long and com-
1152 mitted relationship between a woman and man, and does not wish to alter this under-

1153 standing. It recognizes, however, that some states have enacted or are in the process of
1154 enacting legislation in which the term “marriage” is used. This is the prerogative of the
1155 state, which is the realm in which civil marriage and the laws governing it exist.

1156

1157 *The necessity of mercy, always*

1158 It therefore follows that this church celebrates the significance of marriage. It understands
1159 marriage as blessed by God as a primary basis of human community. It understands marriage
1160 as a profound relationship of mutual promises in which a couple vows to meet all the chal-
1161 lenges that the future may hold. It recognizes the joy of marriage as grounded in the grace of
1162 God and sheltered, as a flame protected from the wind, by the couple’s abiding commitment
1163 to one another. It affirms that sexual intimacy is expected to follow the same pattern of growth
1164 marked by the other forms of mutual self-understanding. It believes that the greatest sexual
1165 intimacies should be matched to the highest level of binding commitment.

1166

1167 This church upholds all its members who are single. It
1168 encourages them in trustful and trustworthy lives. It respects
1169 those who choose singleness as a way of life. It recognizes
1170 that unmarried members, single or otherwise, have distinc-
1171 tive forms of commitment to and reliance upon friends,
1172 family members, coworkers, and the fellowship of Christ.

This church upholds all its members who are single. It encourages them in trustful and trustworthy lives. It respects those who choose singleness as a way of life.

1173

1174 This church continues to oppose transient sexual affairs and promiscuity. It does so while
1175 undertaking to help all who are sexually active, married and unmarried alike, to demon-
1176 strate responsibility and appreciate the dangers of trivialization, betrayal, exploitation,
1177 injustice, and abuse. It commits itself to name and address these dangers when they occur
1178 and to provide pastoral care, support, and protection to those who are affected.

1179

1180 Human lives are littered with broken promises and betrayed trust. Not everyone knows
1181 how to trust and not everyone is trustworthy. Relationships end, including some marriag-
1182 es, because trust has been broken. Given finitude and sin, many things happen in even the
1183 strongest relationships that threaten trust. Forgiveness and reconciliation, then, join with
1184 mutuality and justice to support the life of adult intimacy.

V Social trust and the common good

Trust is essential for the good of society. Although this often is not recognized, this is true in general terms for the proper functioning of communities. It pertains especially, however, to civic institutions and the social practices that affect human sexuality or are affected by it. The development of social trust must be a central concern for Christians who seek the good of the neighbor in the pursuit of justice and the common good through civil law. Families cannot succeed alone; they need healthy communities.⁴⁴

Concepts of trust and promise, and loyalty and reliance often are not connected with thinking about economic life, political arrangements, social policies, and social structures. Public life normally is discussed in terms of rights and duties, contracts and entitlements, and interests and protections. Contemporary social scientists, however, are calling attention to the almost invisible bonds of trust and reliance as bedrock for a well-functioning society. They 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.

Social scientists recognize that the real value of contracts, rights, and a justice-oriented legal code is their capacity to foster social trust. For instance, contracts are valuable precisely because they formalize social confidence about relationships and transactions.

Trust replaces cynicism, suspicion, and self-defense when members of the community enjoy the assurance that the well-being of all individuals is protected and that all participants in the social order may object to injustice with the expectation that justice will be rendered.

The development of social trust must be a central concern for Christians who seek the good of the neighbor in the pursuit of justice and the common good through civil law.

Christian social and political thought long has centered on the idea of the common good. As the Apostle Paul writes, “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all...” (Galatians 6:10). The common good both requires social trust and builds social trust. It requires social trust because those whose immediate interests are being overridden need to be confident that their sacrifice is not demanded simply so that

1217 others may prosper at their expense. The common good also builds social trust. When it
1218 functions, those who sacrifice for the greater good will see those sacrifices as contribu-
1219 tions to those good things all hold in common.

1220

1221 As human beings shift from serving themselves to serving the neighbor, they learn to act
1222 in ways that enhance social trust. St. Paul calls those things that shred the bonds of trust
1223 “works of the flesh...fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities,
1224 strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and
1225 things like these.” However, the “fruits of the Spirit,” which Paul also lists in his letter to
1226 the Galatians—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness,
1227 and self-control”—are behaviors that build a trusting community (Galatians 5:19-23).

1228

1229 The challenge of establishing, maintaining, and fostering social trust involves more than
1230 private actions. It also requires that this church serve the
1231 neighbor by helping to shape legal, commercial, techno-
1232 logical, and civic structures for the common good. Ex-
1233 amples include social institutions of family, the conduct of
1234 commerce, laws enacted and enforced by government, and
1235 community standards. This is a challenge both for ELCA
1236 individuals as members of society and for this church as
1237 an institution in society.

As this church and its mem-
bers engage the remarkable,
sometimes liberating, and yet
troubling changes of the past
several decades related to hu-
man sexuality, careful thought
must be given to which
changes enhance and which
erode social trust.

1238

1239 As this church and its members engage the remarkable, sometimes liberating, and yet
1240 troubling changes of the past several decades related to human sexuality, careful thought
1241 must be given to which changes enhance and which erode social trust. This church must be
1242 a leader in refocusing attention in our society on practices related to human sexuality that
1243 build the common good. Likewise, it must urge a wider social appreciation of the role eco-
1244 nomic and social policies and practices play in shaping sexuality within social life.

1245

1246 ***Our calling to establish the kind of social trust the world urgently needs***

1247 Far from understanding “the world” as a realm separate from God’s love and care, Lutherans
1248 understand that God governs the civic realm of the law as much as the religious realm of the

1249 gospel. Lutherans understand themselves to be called by God to exercise Christian responsi-
1250 bility in the affairs of the world. These callings from God are not restricted to either the house-
1251 hold or the church, but include places of work and the public realm.

1252

1253 Christians understand that social structures cannot give faith, hope, and love, but trust
1254 that God will bless and provide appropriate gifts through such structures and, in some
1255 cases, in spite of them. In times of great change, people of faith must examine their insti-
1256 tutions closely to see how they affect their behavior.

1257

1258 Every new generation questions institutions and institutions should and do change.
1259 Careful thought about the reasons for the existence of institutions, the boundaries they
1260 provide, and the protections they offer enhances discussion with younger generations
1261 and promotes the capacity for moral understanding and action.

1262

1263 Since social trust is directly related to social justice, this church must call for justice in
1264 matters relating to families and sexuality. Justice for women in church and society should
1265 continue to be an important dimension of ELCA concern and action. This church must
1266 also attend to the cry for just laws and just treatment within and outside the ELCA by
1267 those with varied sexual identities.

1268

1269 Complex and profound changes have occurred in family law over the past fifty years re-
1270 lating to divorce, alimony and child support, custody, adoption, parental rights, and civil
1271 unions. The continuing evolution of family law is of vital importance as legislators and
1272 courts strive to protect dependent persons and justly assign responsibility for their care.

1273

1274 These laws have a direct impact on patterns of social trust within households and net-
1275 works of kin. Criminal statutes, state enforcement, and judicial handling of matters
1276 related to sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual threats, and domestic violence require
1277 our close attention. Victims of sexual violation must be able to turn trustfully to public
1278 institutions for intervention in troubled relationships. They must be able to expect protec-
1279 tion from threats when their trust in an individual has been abused.

1280

1281 This church, and all individual members within it, must accept that we all share respon-
1282 sibility for the commercial and technological forces that damage individuals and insti-
1283 tutions. In assessing the impact of such forces, the temptation is to focus exclusively
1284 on individual behaviors. It is far harder to assess responsibility for systemic harm or to
1285 imagine how to bring about change.⁴⁵

1286

1287 This church must seek to influence social forces such as mass media and commercial
1288 marketing in ways that contribute to sexual health. Christian responsibility includes
1289 naming these systemic forces and monitoring the ways in which they constrain or
1290 support healthy individual choices.

1291

1292 ***Our calling to confront collective distrust and idolatry as the source of harm***

1293 Captivity to sin breeds many idols, things in which we put our trust instead of trusting
1294 God. In the Large Catechism, Luther mentions especially wealth.⁴⁶

1295

1296 In this society, the acquisition and growth of personal
1297 and corporate wealth particularly are valued and affect all
1298 aspects of sexual life. When the love of wealth becomes
1299 public idolatry and social mistrust, the sexual body soon

This church therefore notes with grave concern the public commodification of the body as an economic asset.

1300 is reduced to being an object for commercial purposes. This church therefore notes with
1301 grave concern the public commodification⁴⁷ of the body as an economic asset.

1302

1303 This includes sex work as a form of employment and the sale and purchase of pornogra-
1304 phy.⁴⁸ It includes the sale of sperm and ova. It also includes commercialization, where
1305 sexual images are used extensively in advertising and the mass media, to promote the sale
1306 of products.

1307

1308 Children and the poor are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation for profit. In the
1309 midst of such rampant commodification, which affects both the exploited and their con-
1310 sumers, this church is challenged to promote justice and trust. All are complicit in the
1311 greedy misuse and abuse of people for pleasure and profit. This church must confess its
1312 own complicity and find its voice to oppose all forms of exploitation.

1313 This church should challenge and confront all those who legally profit from the commod-
1314 ification of sexuality. These include:

- 1315 • Web sites that display and sell a wide variety of pornographic materials;
- 1316 • television networks that portray married sexuality as burdensome and promiscuous
1317 sexual activity as normal and consequence-free; and
- 1318 • corporations, whenever and wherever they trade healthy sexuality and respectful
1319 treatment of the human body for profit.

1320

1321 This church must speak out against all that systematically undermines efforts to raise
1322 healthy children and build solid marriages and trusting relationships. This church must
1323 insist that the existence of a market is not a sufficient moral basis to use it.⁴⁹

1324

1325 There is much work to be done by this church in the area of corporate social responsibil-
1326 ity. Businesses and corporate interests that profit from the
1327 objectification and misuse of sexuality should be chal-
1328 lenged. They should also be held accountable for portray-
1329 ing and reinforcing the message “sex sells” to millions.
1330 Efforts should be made to work with public and private
1331 institutions⁵⁰ to create structures, policies, and practices
1332 that hold them accountable to social norms of protection.
1333 These include codes of practice that protect society, espe-
1334 cially children and the most vulnerable, from the misuse and abuse of sexuality for profit.

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.

1335

1336 This church must also produce meaningful educational materials for teenagers and adults
1337 that lift up God’s call for individual and social trust that serves the neighbor in all aspects
1338 of human sexuality. Such materials must expose social idolatries in the light of God’s
1339 forgiveness and creation’s free and good gifts. This church must work with other citizens
1340 of good will to craft enforceable and fair laws, particularly aimed at protecting the most
1341 weak and vulnerable among us, especially children. In these matters the responsibility of
1342 all God’s people for love and justice in the world needs to be exercised.

1343

1344

1345 It therefore follows that this church should commit itself to constructing trustworthy
1346 structures for the sexual lives of its members. It should educate its members in the impor-
1347 tance of social trust and publicly support policies and laws that enhance social trust and
1348 redress violations of trust at all levels of church and society.

1349

1350 It should support social arrangements that encourage the growth of mutual confidence
1351 and publicly question arrangements that erode social trust or undermine the structures
1352 in which trust is learned and preserved. It should confront those corporations and
1353 institutions that profit from betraying social trust through demeaning sexuality and the
1354 human body.

1355

1356 The long-standing concerns of this church for social justice and the protection of the
1357 vulnerable should guide its teachings and practices in relation to sexuality. These con-
1358 cerns should lead us to analyze the institutions and systems that influence the behavior of
1359 individuals.⁵¹ The most effective work this church can do
1360 for the healing of the world likely will come through its
1361 traditional strength—the trusting and trustworthy Chris-
1362 tian community found in household, congregation, and the
1363 broader church. Ministries that address the real needs of
1364 people, especially the most vulnerable, are an important
1365 priority for outreach.

The long-standing concerns of this church for social justice and the protection of the vulnerable should guide its teachings and practices in relation to sexuality.

1366

1367 *The mission and ministry of this church*

1368 Contemporary realities related to human sexuality and the response of this church to
1369 those realities raise important questions related to the mission and ministry of this church.
1370 The context for mission in this country has changed and is changing dramatically. The
1371 work of healing is unending and the cry of the neighbor for sustaining love, justice, and
1372 protection from harm tears at the heart of the Church.

1373

1374 The greatest gift of healing and hope that Christians can share is to proclaim both God's
1375 forgiveness of sin through reconciliation in Christ and the steadfast trustworthiness of
1376 God's promises. With its long history of commitment to justice and to social services, this

1377 church is well positioned to offer leadership in working against domestic violence and
1378 sexual assault, workplace harassment and discrimination, child abuse, the abandonment
1379 of children, gender inequities, and violence against or persecution of sexual minorities.

1380

1381 This church must continue to find ways to train leaders and members about the impor-
1382 tance of personal and sexual boundaries. This church must not tolerate any violation of
1383 those boundaries by rostered leaders, employees, and others who care for people on its
1384 behalf. The ELCA must continue to uphold the sanctity of the pastoral office and not al-
1385 low that office to be misused by some individuals for the sexual abuse of others.

1386

1387 This church must perpetually recommit itself to making its congregations places of trust
1388 and safety for everyone. Members must tend carefully to the needs of one another, pro-
1389 viding support, encouragement, counsel, and protection from harm. Through the means of
1390 grace and pastoral care this church should continually engage God's promises of forgive-
1391 ness and grace.

1392

1393 All congregations should seek to be safe and welcoming places to discuss sexual issues.
1394 All such conversations should include those most affected. The mission and ministry of
1395 congregations should be visibly open to all, including single adults, cohabiting adults,
1396 adults approaching marriage, families undergoing dissolution, single parents, blended
1397 families, and same-sex couples. As a matter of service and outreach, congregations
1398 should consciously and conscientiously shape their mission in response to the needs of
1399 all. Children and youth and those who bear special burdens deserve particular care.

1400

1401 Together this church seeks the good of the neighbor. Together this church in all its expres-
1402 sions and ministry sites seeks to offer guidance, support, solace, liturgical sustenance, and
1403 personal or relational healing.

1404

1405 **VI Conclusion**

1406

1407 This church understands that responsible action requires both ethics and discernment. The
1408 work of moral discernment is an important dimension of this church's identity. It is car-

1409 ried on by all members of the ELCA community and is lived out best when all participate
1410 as full members of this community. We come as we are—teens, young adults, middle-
1411 aged adults, and mature adults; single, married, divorced, and partnered; straight and gay;
1412 right, left, and center—with a good will and, in Paul’s words, a heart “widened” by God’s
1413 mercy (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

1414

1415 This social statement represents a contribution to the ongoing work of moral discernment
1416 within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is circumscribed necessarily by the
1417 broadness of the subject of human sexuality, by disagreements in matters of sexual ethics,
1418 and by our rapidly changing social context. However, this statement also celebrates that it is
1419 precisely in such times that the Lutheran emphasis on the incarnation, justification, and our
1420 Confessional tradition prepares us for the work of discernment as we seek to live faithfully.

1421

1422 Based on the theological foundation established in this
1423 social statement, this church should continue to engage
1424 in moral deliberation regarding human sexuality. It may
1425 wish to draw upon the vast experience and expertise of
1426 members of this church in preparing additional social
1427 statements or messages to allow for more in-depth consid-
1428 eration of the many matters related to human sexuality that
1429 are of concern and import to the mission and ministry of
1430 this church.

Because of God’s embrace of all the creation in Christ, we are a people set free for lives of responsibility aimed at seeking the good of the neighbor. Following Jesus, we discern what this responsibility means in terms of human sexuality.

1431

1432 Because of God’s embrace of all the creation in Christ, we are a people set free for
1433 lives of responsibility aimed at seeking the good of the neighbor. Following Jesus, we
1434 discern what this responsibility means in terms of human sexuality. We do this not in
1435 some abstract ideal realm, but amid all the complexities, conflicts, joys, and sorrows
1436 of actual social and individual life. It is a task that this church accepts as a redeemed
1437 community. As simultaneously sinners in captivity and yet liberated, forgiven people of
1438 faith, we walk both humbly and boldly toward God’s promised future.

1439

1440

Endnotes

1 These include changes in gender roles and expectations, family planning, attitudes toward the body, sexual practices, forms of sexual exploitation, fertility management, forms of courtship, partnering, and family life. Such changes are deeply connected to broad economic, technological, and demographic changes. They may appear more pronounced in certain societies, such as in the United States, but they are at work in every culture to varying degrees. We can expect this period of rapid and complex change to continue.

2 *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (ELCA, 1991), 6.

3 The development of this social statement was mandated by the 2001 Churchwide Assembly. Reference can be found in the 2001 Churchwide Assembly Minutes, CA01.06.45.

4 For example, the ELCA acknowledges the report “Lutheran World Federation: Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue” as received by the LWF Council in March 2007 and commended to LWF member churches.

5 The term “neighbor” as used in this statement follows a scriptural understanding. In Matthew 22, “neighbor” may refer to family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. But “neighbor” also implies groups and broad social networks (Galatians 6:10). The meaning depends on the context.

6 Justification and incarnation provide the theological framework for this discussion of human sexuality. This may surprise some, but because sin has intervened, Christians cannot ground their understanding of sexuality in nature or creation itself. The Large Catechism, Creed, 64-65 explains that we do not know God as anything other than an angry judge except through Christ, “who is the mirror of the Father’s heart,” and we do not trust in Christ except through the work of the Holy Spirit. In this sense Christians cannot understand God’s intention for creation except when viewing it through the lens of what God has done for us in becoming flesh. Kolb, Robert and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 439-440.

Lutheran discussions of sexuality have sometimes employed other theological categories as their primary framework. For example, “orders of creation” has been one of the most common, often used in tandem with a static biological understanding of “natural law.” The term “orders of creation” and its conceptualization was first formalized in the nineteenth century. Gottlieb Christoph Adolf von Harleß (See *Christliche Ethik*, 7th ed. [Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1875], 491), who proposed this term to highlight the provisional nature of human social arrangements. Later, it was linked to a static notion of creation and the idea of “orders” became fixed as one-time acts of God in the past. They indicated the establishing of human society in a hierarchy of fixed and final social arrangements. On this basis many in the church once objected to the democratic revolutions of modern times on the ground of the divine right of kings.

The concept of “orderings” assumed here is dynamic and provisional. It understands the orders of creation, or better, “orderings of preservation,” as subject to God’s ongoing creative activity. They are discussed, therefore, under the rubric of hope and the entire discussion of sexuality is grounded by justification and incarnation as the theological framework.

7 It is true, of course, that the church has given way to this error many times throughout Christian history. For instance, certain early church theologians argued that Christians should not have sexual desires, even toward a spouse. Such ideas supported the medieval church teaching that celibacy was a high and pure religious good.

8 Kolb and Wengert. Smalcald Articles III.2, 311-12. The Lutheran Confessions also acknowledge a “third use” of the law, the law as “teacher.” Kolb and Wengert. Formula of Concord VI, 502-03. The guiding or teaching function of the law is reflected elsewhere in this statement.

- 9 Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 344. This treatise is also available as part of *Three Treaties*, a printing of three key essays from 1520. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973)
- 10 Ibid., 343. See also the editor's introduction, 329.
- 11 This quote is translated from what Martin Luther wrote for the preface to the published doctoral theses debated in Wittenberg's theological faculty in 1537 (WA 39 I, 205, 2-5). The Formula of Concord, published in 1580, repeated this idea in different words in the article on justification. Kolb and Wengert, *Solid Declaration*, art. 3, par. 6, quoting the Apology, art. 4, par. 2-3, 563.
- 12 God's grace is expressed through acts of creation (common grace) as well as through the grace received in Christ (special grace).
- 13 Kolb and Wengert, *Small Catechism, Creed*, par. 4, 355.
- 14 See Kolb and Wengert, *Small Catechism, Creed*, par. 6, and the Lord's Supper, par. 6 355; 362.
- 15 The writings of Martin Luther (WA 26, 504ff) and the Confessions suggest the first three of these. See, for example, Kolb and Wengert, *Small Catechism, Household Chart*, 365-67. A fourth seems appropriate since "household" at that time included not only familial relationships but also employment, which today takes place most often outside the home.
- 16 *Luther's Works*, vol. 49 (no. 157 and 158) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 116ff.
- 17 ELCA Constitution, sections 2.05 and 2.06.
- 18 This is to say that our sources of "knowing" also fall under the theology of the cross (God revealed in the last place we would reasonably look) and not a theology of glory (God known in the places humans would reasonably look, such as in the beauty or power of nature, or even in the moral order).
- 19 "Legalism" indicates a belief in the need for literal adherence to or trust in commands and "shoulds," whether from Scripture or elsewhere. "...no need for law under the gospel" indicates a belief or practice that moral guidance from Scripture or elsewhere is unnecessary because the principle of Christian love by itself is a sufficient moral guide.
- 20 Kolb and Wengert, *Small Catechism, Creed*, 2, 354.
- 21 *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines "holism" as "emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts." (*The American Heritage Electronic Dictionary: College Edition*, 1991, 1992 Houghton Mifflin Co.)
- 22 In article 20 of the Augsburg Confession par. 24-26, Kolb and Wengert, 56, Philip Melancthon summarizes this insight about faith: "All who know that in Christ they have a gracious God call upon him and are not, like the heathen, without God. For the devil and the ungodly do not believe this article about the forgiveness of sin. That is why they are enemies of God, cannot call upon him, and cannot hope for anything good from him. Moreover, as has now been indicated, Scripture talks about faith but does not label it knowledge such as the devil and the ungodly have. For Hebrews 11[:1] teaches that faith is not only a matter of historical knowledge, but a matter of having confidence in God to receive his promise. Augustine also reminds us that we should understand the word 'faith' in Scripture to mean confidence in God—that God is gracious to us—and not merely such knowledge of these stories as the devils also have."
- 23 In this statement the term "family," includes a variety of forms, more akin to the older term of "household," often employed by Luther.
- 24 See Kolb and Wengert, *Small Catechism, Preface*, par. 19-20, 350 and *Large Catechism, Ten Commandments*, par. 167-78, 409-10.

- 25 See for instance Luther's reference to the fourth commandment while discussing the sixth. Kolb and Wengert, *Large Catechism, Ten Commandments*, par. 167-78, 413ff. See also paragraphs 206 and 218.
- 26 These include laws governing marriage, inheritance, guardianship, custody, and parental rights and duties. The interdependence and mutual responsibilities of married couples are crucial in welding them into a legal unit as well as a loving household. Parents and guardians are legally compelled to attend to the welfare, support, protection, and education of their children and youth.
- 27 Such trends include remarkably large numbers of physically or psychologically absent fathers, and teenagers with parenting responsibilities for which they are not prepared. It includes the reluctance of some men and women to commit themselves in marriage. Stresses on marriages and individuals in marriages contribute to high rates of divorce with accompanying concerns for children and other extended family members.
- 28 Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions assume and encourage households, similar in some ways to this model, but historically there have been wide variations that included many other family members, widowed heads of households, laborers, and the like.
- 29 This point and the supporting data may be found in various sources. One source is the recent attempt by Don S. Browning to summarize and employ that data for a constructive proposal in *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies*. (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). See especially the citations in Chapters four and seven.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 "Commercial Sexual Exploitation,"(Chicago: ELCA, 2001), 3.
- 32 "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," (Chicago: ELCA 2001), 1.
- 33 *Abortion*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), 4-5.
- 34 Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* Vol. 31, 365.
- 35 *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2003).
- 36 A variety of research supports this claim in relation to sexual activity. See, for instance, *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* by Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2004).
- 37 Luther's concluding explanation of the sixth commandment says this about marriage: "...above all it is essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity." Kolb and Wengert, *Large Catechism, Ten Commandments*, par. 219, 415.
- 38 There are European countries in which cohabitation is legally recognized as a distinctive form of contractual commitment entailing specified rights and duties.
- 39 See *Journey Together Faithfully, ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Part Two, The Church and Homosexuality*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2003). See also the supplement for that study: *Background Essay on Biblical Texts for Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality*, by Arland Hultgren and Walter F. Taylor Jr.
- 40 2005 Churchwide Assembly Minutes, CA05.05.17, Recommendation 1.
- 41 Churchwide Assembly Minutes for 1991, 1995 and 1999 respectively, CA91.07.51; CA95.6.50; CA99.06.27. The exact wording for each of these actions may be found at www.elca.org .
- 42 2005 Churchwide Assembly Minutes, CA05.05.18, Recommendation 2.

- 43 1997 Churchwide Assembly Minutes, CA97.06.56 affirms “the advocacy of synods and the Division for Church in Society in support of laws barring discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation.”
- 44 Statistically, the healthier both family and community institutions are, the higher the number of developmental assets among all its members, especially youth. Strong community institutions have a significant impact on lowering the incidence of at-risk behaviors among young people, including intimate sexual activity at young ages. The relative health of a community’s institutions such as schools, churches, and civic organizations matters significantly. See for instance *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets Among American Youth* by Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999).
- 45 See the section “Our obligation and ongoing tensions” in *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, p. 3 and following. (Chicago: ELCA, 1999).
- 46 Kolb and Wengert, Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, par. 5-9, 387.
- 47 The transformation of anything into a commodity to be bought and sold.
- 48 It should not be overlooked that the sex trade and pornography are multibillion dollar industries.
- 49 “While a market economy emphasizes what individuals *want* and are willing and able to buy, as people of faith we realize that what human beings *want* is not necessarily what they *need* for the sake of life.” *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*. (Chicago: ELCA, 1999), 3.
- 50 This includes many forms of social, economic, and business institutions.
- 51 This analysis should be oriented toward helping members of this church identify these influences in their lives, to evaluate their effects (recognizing that many social structures and arrangements do support and encourage trust), and to find appropriate and effective means of addressing those social forces that are judged to be harmful.

#

Response Form
Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

Please return your response by **November 1, 2008**

Send to:
Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Church in Society
8765 W. Higgins Rd
Chicago, IL 60631

Or e-mail to:
faithfuljourney@elca.org

Or respond online at
www.elca.org/faithfuljourney

Please indicate the following about this response:

- This response comes from an individual
- This response comes from a group of individuals who are not responding separately
If so, how many are in the group? 2-5 6-10 11-20 More than 20
If so, what is the nature or type of group? _____

Whether your response is from a group or from an individual, please provide as much of the following information as you wish:

Name: _____

Congregation: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Thank you for completing this form. Your response will contribute to the process by which the "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality" will be revised, corrected, and strengthened for 2009. If you do not have a response for a specific question, simply skip that question and move to the next one.

1. How well does the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* provide a useful and adequate framework to help this church discern what it means to live faithfully with our neighbors in the increasingly complex sphere of human sexuality?

<u>Not Very Well</u>					<u>Very Well</u>
1	2	3	4	5	
<input type="radio"/>					

Comments:

2. How helpful is each sub-section in Section II in explaining how Lutherans approach ethics?

	Not Very Helpful				Very Helpful
	1	2	3	4	5
a. Incarnation, justification and serving the neighbor.	0	0	0	0	0
b. Sexual ethics shaped by God’s mercy and compassion	0	0	0	0	0
c. Living as people of hope	0	0	0	0	0
d. Scripture and moral discernment	0	0	0	0	0

What, if anything, is a specific strength of Section II?

What, if anything, would you hope to see added to Section II?

3. How helpful is each sub-section in Section III at interpreting why Lutherans regard our sexuality as one of the continuing blessings of God’s good creation while acknowledging the complexities and difficulties that people experience in the sexual dimension of their lives?

	Not Very Helpful				Very Helpful
	1	2	3	4	5
a. The complexity of individual sexuality	0	0	0	0	0
b. The social character of sexuality	0	0	0	0	0

What, if anything, is a specific strength of Section III?

What, if anything, would you hope to see added to Section III?

#

4. How helpful is each sub-section in Section IV in exploring matters of sexuality and relationships?

	<u>Not Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> 1	2	3	4	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> 5
a. Strong families: a ground and source of trust	0	0	0	0	0
b. Protecting children and youth in and for trusting relationships	0	0	0	0	0
c. Sexuality and self	0	0	0	0	0
d. Gender and friendships	0	0	0	0	0
e. Commitment and sexuality	0	0	0	0	0
f. Marriage	0	0	0	0	0
g. Relationships involving intimate sexual relations outside of marriage	0	0	0	0	0
h. Same gender committed relationships	0	0	0	0	0
i. The necessity of mercy, always	0	0	0	0	0

What, if anything, is a specific strength of Section IV?

What, if anything, would you hope to see added to Section IV?

5. How helpful is each sub-section in Section V in understanding matters of sexuality related to life in society?

	<u>Not Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> 1	2	3	4	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> 5
a. Our calling to establish the kind of social trust the world urgently needs	0	0	0	0	0
b. Our calling to confront distrust, abuse, and idolatry as sources of harm.	0	0	0	0	0
c. The mission and ministry of this church	0	0	0	0	0

What, if anything, is a specific strength of Section V?

What, if anything, would you hope to see added to Section V?

6. How well does the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* balance the need to speak to issues in intimate personal relationships with the need to address social issues that are broader and structural?

<u>Not Very Well</u>				<u>Very Well</u>
1	2	3	4	5
0	0	0	0	0

Comments:

7. How well does the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* helpfully address the needs and questions of all people in this church?

<u>Not Very Well</u>				<u>Very Well</u>
1	2	3	4	5
0	0	0	0	0

Comments:

8. The proposed social statement on human sexuality will have a series of implementing resolutions. Such resolutions provide an opportunity to commit the church to the development of additional resources or programs relevant to the concerns of the social statement. Please list up to three topics you think it would be essential to include among the implementing resolutions for this social statement.

Ordering a copy

A single copy of the draft can be obtained without cost by downloading it from the sexuality studies Web site (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney) or by calling 800-638-3522 ext 2996.

Multiple copies may be ordered from Augsburg Fortress (call 800/328-4648.)

A Spanish translation will be available online as of June 1, 2008. Download it from the sexuality studies Web site (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney).

Sending your comments to the task force

You are invited to respond to the draft and send your comments to Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. You may use the response form at the back of this document or write your comments in letter or essay form. Please send them to the task force by November 1, 2008.

You may send your comments to:

Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Church in Society
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4190

Or e-mail them to faithfuljourney@elca.org

Or respond online (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney)

Participating in hearings

You are invited to participate in hearings on the draft to be held in most synods. Information and dates for these hearings will be posted on the Web site. Please visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney .



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