

Report on Hearings for Draft Social Statement
Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality
11/10/08

Following is a report on the areas of concern raised by the hearings whose reports were turned in as of mid-October. There are other reports yet to come, but reports have been consistent over time.

Affirmations

There was much in the way of positive response to the draft. Hearing attenders often expressed appreciation for the theological section's strong undergirding of the draft. The Lutheran articulation of justification and faith as trust also garnered much appreciation. The theme of trust as applied to social dimensions of the draft was found by many to be a very helpful approach. That trust allowed the draft to address commodification was deeply appreciated, as were sections on abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. Many attendees commented with delight on the sections on self and sexuality and gender and friendships. Affirmation of the section on family and protecting children was also common. Readers found much about the draft to compliment.

Areas for Attention from the Task Force

For this report to be most useful to the task force in its November meeting, it will concentrate on areas which generated the most discussion and call for change in hearings.

Nearly every hearing contained a comment that the document was too long, complex, and unreadable. Several asked if the task force could also make a summary available.

For every statement about the document (except the above statement about the length and **complexity** of the document) there was an opposing statement, sometimes within the very same hearing. We begin with the assumption that it is possible for people to disagree completely about the same document.

Broader themes

Many responders wanted to know where the **Law** was in this draft. They felt it was all Gospel and no Law. Others said "this is all Law and no Gospel." The proper balance can be quite subjective. A number of people felt the 3rd use of the Law should be included. **Creation** was mentioned often. Creation is thought by many to be determinative of our sexuality, and for those who hold this view, a social statement on sexuality should be based on creation. One participant expressed the opinion that without looking to creation and orders of creation, we have no laws and boundaries. For people who wanted to begin with creation, beginning with incarnation was an error. More than one person stated that ethics is a matter of the first article.

Related to creation, many expressed concern about being called **creatures** and about being created as sexual and therefore relational. In objecting, some people seemed to think that the term creatures implied a theological statement that God has created homosexuality as part of the order of creation. Most people who commented felt firmly that we are relational first and sexual second, or that being a sexual creature was secondary to being a Christian. There were occasional comments that indicated that the draft made too much of sexuality. For many people, sexuality is not as problematic as depicted in the draft and not as much of a driving force in our behavior as they interpreted the social statement as saying.

Trust was helpful to many, worrisome to others. For people for whom it was worrisome, it did not offer enough in the way of boundaries. It also did not, in their view, require **obedience** to God. A few people thought the draft needed to talk more about broken trust. The need for obedience and **repentance** were of concern to many. On the other hand, many were offended by the very prospect of calling people to repentance in the same gender relationship section.

Scripture: people have often asked for more scriptural references, or to begin with Scripture. Often they are merely asking us to back up what we have said with a scriptural reference. For those who asked to begin with Scripture, given that the statement actually does begin by quoting Matthew and moves on to Romans and Galatians, the concern seems to be that we begin with and give priority to Genesis. Occasionally people dispute scriptural references. The most common places where people seemed to expect Scripture to be cited were with reference to same gender relationships and with reference to the creation account(s) of Genesis. There were many references to "sola Scriptura." A number of people were dismayed that the draft suggested that human knowledge might have a role to play. On the other hand, many others called for greater scientific input from the biological and social sciences.

Specific Sections

The section on the consequences of perverse love occasioned much comment and interest. Some felt that the writer was talking about lust and we should not call it love at all. Others suggested calling it disordered love.

Many people wanted a **clear directive**, a yes or no answer to the questions they were facing. This comment was made most commonly in reference to the **same gender** section, where people either wanted the Task Force to call a sin a sin or to be prophetic. Other people appreciated that the document reflected the division in the church and didn't come down implacably on either side. There seemed to be a lot of surprise for people that the draft addressed **social** issues rather than individual behaviors in exacting detail. One person said "I don't believe that social sin exists," which suggests that to some people the very concept of social sin may be novel and unwelcome. For some people, the language chosen by the task force about **cohabitation** was unclear. Quite a few were happy that cohabiting seniors were addressed, and most seemed pleased with what was in the draft. Some people seemed to want the draft to list sexual behaviors and whether they were prohibited. Quite a few people expressed the

"hate the sin, love the sinner" perspective, advising **celibacy** for gays and lesbians. People on all sides of the issue suggested that the task force articulate the basis of the lack of consensus regarding same gender relationships.

Use of the term **marriage** evoked many responses. Some wanted all references to marriage to refer to two adults. Others wanted all references to marriage to include the qualifier of one man and one woman. One or two people said that it was a false statement to say that all marriages fall short. Quite a few wondered why **divorce** was not addressed. Several wanted **adultery** to be addressed and mentioned the sixth commandment. There were a few calls to use the image of Christ and church in the marriage section, but not many.

The section on **family** occasioned mostly praise and reflection. Some were concerned that same sex parents might be included in the definition of family. Some were concerned that same sex parents were not affirmed strongly enough. There was some call for upholding a family of opposite gender parents with their birth children as the norm. (One person said the Bible gives a model for the family life.) Many spoke in favor of a complex definition of family. Some suggested changing family to household.

Nearly every person who spoke about it disputed including the sale of sperm and ova in the **commodification** category. People were often confused by the word commodification. There was broad support for the general principle of the section.

Many hearings debated over **civil marriage** versus ecclesial marriage, often touched off by the statement in the same gender section referring to the state. States are passing laws related to same sex marriage and civil unions, and pastors would like help in responding. More than one person suggested the church get out of the marriage business altogether, and no longer have its ministers act as agents of the state.

Some responders felt the draft did not question the **culture** enough, or was driven by culture. Others felt it was years behind reality. Specific concerns and preconceptions seemed to determine which view they took of culture.

Something a few people mentioned to be missing was guidance in ministering to people who have been **scarred by sexual abuse**. People also mentioned that the draft was far too doleful, that we have utterly missed out on the **joy** of sexuality.

Occasionally responders said they appreciated the **pastoral** quality of the document. Quite a few pastors appreciated the complex description of sexuality. Some pastors said they needed more to minister to cohabiting couples and same gender couples.

Terms to define:

1. intercourse is inaccurate, and genital sexual interaction should be referred to as coitus

2. conjugal family refers to a family in which husband, wife, and biological children and no one else are under the same roof
3. love--agape love?
4. The term "living voice of the Gospel" occasioned much consternation and close reading along with attempts at exegesis.
5. sexuality, sexual, what is sexual behavior
6. pornography
7. gender

To conclude, it might be best to quote a pastor who spoke at one of the hearings:
"We've heard from both sides a need and desire for certainty, yet we have a theological tradition that is created out of tension, and we are called to live out that tension."

The hearings were quite consistent in the themes and topics that were of interest to people, but what hearing attendees wanted the document to say was often diametrically opposed.