

## **Responses to the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality**

Research and Evaluation

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### **Overview**

As part of the ongoing process to develop a social statement on human sexuality, Research and Evaluation collaborated with Church in Society to develop a response form for people to share their reactions to the draft statement. The draft statement was released to the public in March 2008, and respondents were invited to share their responses online or by sending in a paper form. A total of 2,077 responses were received (58% online and 42% paper).

### **Response Type**

Respondents were first asked to indicate whether the response came from an individual or a group. The large majority of responses were from individuals (84%), with only 16 percent from groups. (See Appendix A for a complete list of frequencies.) For those responses from a group, small groups of two to five individuals were most common (40%). Groups of six to ten (24%) and 11 to 20 (25%) were also common. Few groups were large with more than 20 people (10%).

### **Responses to the Draft Statement**

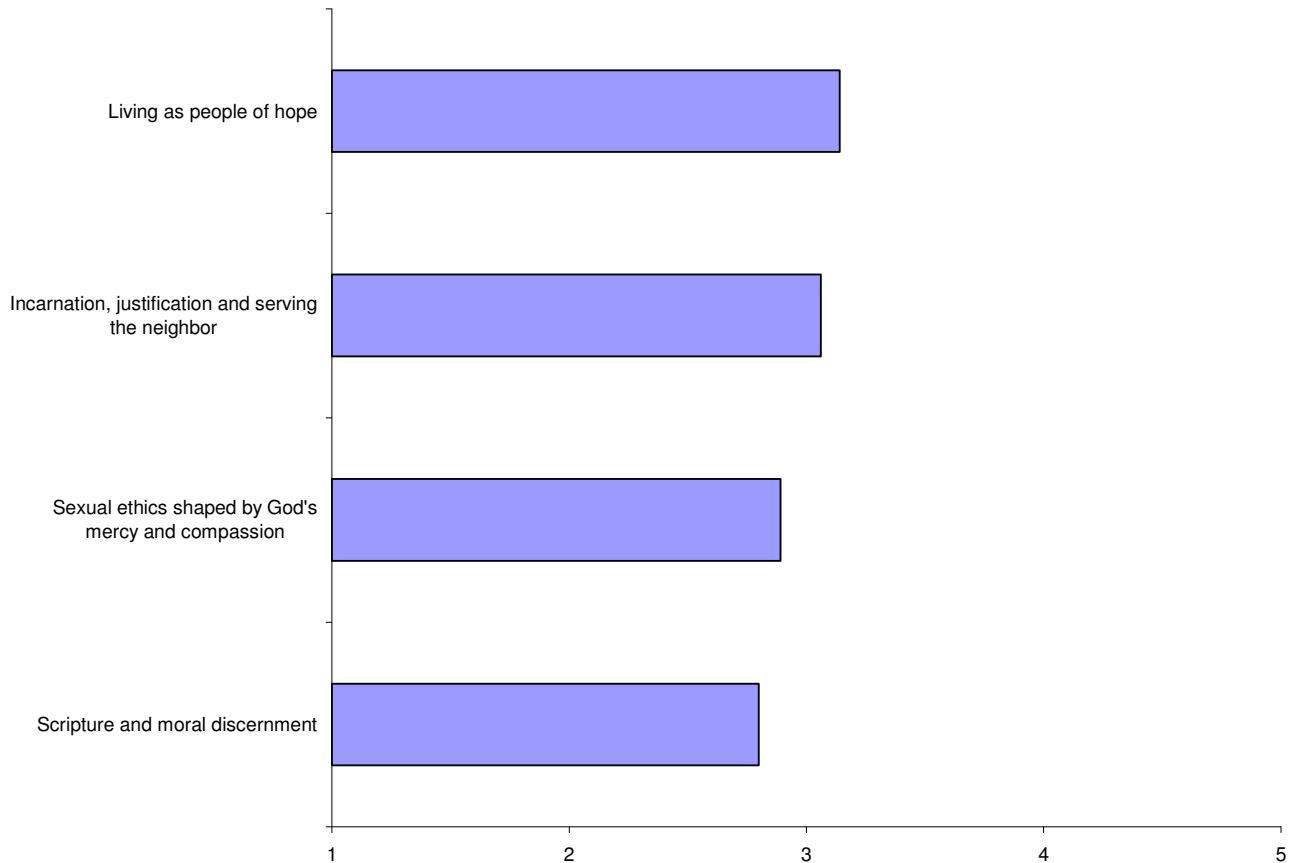
The first question about the draft statement asked respondents to rate how well the statement provides a useful and adequate framework to help this church discern what it means to live faithfully with our neighbors in the increasingly complex sphere of human sexuality. Respondents were given a five-point rating scale, where 1 = “not very well” and 5 = “very well.” Most of the responses fell on either end of the scale, with about 38 percent feeling the statement did not accomplish this very well (1 or 2 on the scale), and another 34 percent saying it did very well (4 or 5 on the scale). Another 28 percent of respondents fell in the middle of the scale, and the mean rating was 2.87.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments to this question, and a total of 917 responses were given. About 40 percent of those who responded felt the draft statement was weak and verbose, and 28 percent felt it was not based on Scripture. On the other hand, ten percent of those who responded felt the draft statement was well thought out and written, and seven percent felt there was respect for all points of view and grounding in Lutheran understanding. About four percent of those providing comments felt the draft statement was trying to please everyone, and three percent of respondents felt there needed to be more emphasis on accepting homosexuals. Two percent of respondents to this question felt the “same gender” question needed to be addressed, and the same number felt the draft statement was too theoretical and needed more specifics. One percent of those responding felt it was money badly spent, it was too much “same old, same old,” it ignores our prime responsibility to first love God, and it doesn’t address how to deal with sinful behavior in society. Another one percent of respondents commented that the issue of ordaining homosexuals was not addressed, the draft statement left out the single and divorced, and one man and one woman equals marriage.

The next few questions addressed each of the sections of the draft statement. Using a five-point rating scale from 1 = “not very helpful” to 5 = “very helpful,” respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of each sub-section in Section II in explaining how Lutherans approach ethics. The highest average

ratings were given for “living as people of hope” (M = 3.14), followed by “incarnation, justification and serving the neighbor” (M = 3.06). (See Figure 1.) Slightly lower ratings were given for “sexual ethics shaped by God’s mercy and compassion” (M = 2.89) and “scripture and moral discernment” (M = 2.80).

**Figure 1: Mean Ratings for Section II**



After the rating scale questions, respondents were asked to indicate what, if anything, was a specific strength of Section II, and a total of 525 responses were given. Almost one-third (32%) of those responding to this question felt the section offered a good explanation of Lutheran ethics and provided a good background to the document. About 20 percent of respondents felt a strength of the section was the concept that we are all tied together in God’s embrace and compassion, and the same number liked the use of Scripture. Ten percent of respondents to this question felt a strength was the understanding that God blesses human sexuality as part of human life. About six percent of respondents liked the discussion of how Scripture can be abused and misunderstood through selective use, and the same number felt the section was beautifully written and very clear. Four percent liked lines 310 to 316 about how sexual ethics should be applied, and two percent felt that it provided a broad discussion of the topic.

Respondents were also asked to list what, if anything, they would hope to see added to Section II, and 606 responses were listed. Over half of the respondents to this question felt the section needed more scriptural references and a tough biblical stand (58%). About 18 percent of those responding felt it was repetitive and too long, and 11 percent requested clarification of vague phrases. About five percent of the respondents would like to see added to this section that we are not to judge. Three percent of

respondents would like a greater emphasis on creation, similar to the predecessor bodies' sexuality statements, and the same number felt the draft does not address "what is sin?" Two percent of respondents felt the section does not directly address homosexuality. One percent of respondents suggested the definition of "neighbor" be put in the text, not just as a footnote. Another one percent of respondents would like a redefinition of the word "love," not just sexual love, and the same number suggested an explanation of Greek rhetorical structure for use with Pauline writings.

Using the same rating scale described above, respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of 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. The highest average ratings were found for "the complexity of individual sexuality" (M = 3.08), followed by "the social character of sexuality" (M = 2.99).

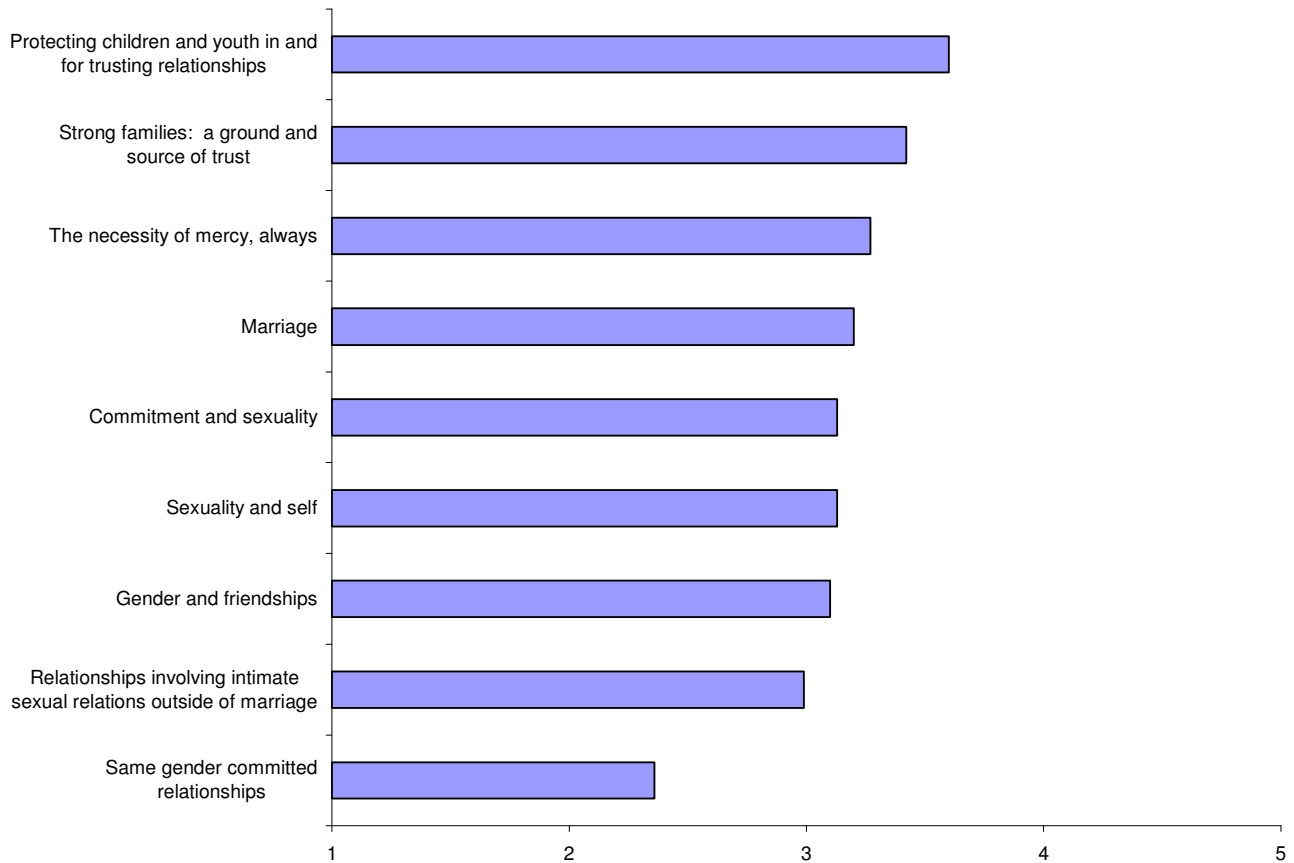
After the rating scale questions, respondents were asked to indicate what, if anything, was a specific strength of Section III, and 429 responses were given. About 21 percent of those responding liked the emphasis on the social character of sexuality, and 18 percent liked the concept of sexuality as a good gift of God. About 15 percent liked the definition of "love" with all its complexities, and 12 percent felt a strength of this section was defining sexuality as more than just sexual intercourse. About nine percent of respondents felt a strength of the section was the concept that humans live in a community. About five percent of respondents liked the language of power and the negative and positive aspects of sexuality, and four percent liked the broad discussion in this section. Another four percent liked the concept that body, mind and spirit are distinguishable, complex and real, and the same number liked the specific examples. Three percent liked that this section is Bible-based, and two percent liked the emphasis on family and the idea of supporting all. About one percent of those responding to this question listed as a strength the use of context, and the same number appreciated the mention of battered spouses and the abuse of love.

Respondents were also asked to list what, if anything, they would hope to see added to Section III, and 383 responses were given. Almost half of the respondents to this question (48%) would like to see more biblical references, without changing Scripture because of society. Eighteen percent of respondents felt this section was too long and confusing, and seven percent would like to see some religion step up and support homosexuality. About six percent of respondents felt the section on social character of sexuality was unclear, and a better definition of love is needed in terms of agape, etc. About four percent of respondents to this question would like a statement added that a person should be married to have sex. Three percent would like more emphasis on the importance of procreation, and the same number felt this section avoided issues of homosexuality and same-sex marriages. Two percent felt there was an under-emphasis on personal responsibility and an overemphasis on blaming society. One percent of respondents suggested more specifics about sex education in confirmation and Sunday school, and specific recommendations on changing ELCA policy. Another one percent also would like to see God's perfect love for us and the result of that love added to this section, and the same number felt we should get down to basics and away from "we are sexual beings."

For Section IV, respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of the sub-sections in exploring matters of sexuality and relationships. (See Figure 2.) The highest average ratings were given for "protecting children and youth in and for trusting relationships" (M = 3.60), followed by "strong families: a ground and source of trust" (M = 3.42). Relatively high ratings were also found for "the necessity of mercy, always" (M = 3.27), "marriage" (M = 3.20), "commitment and sexuality" and "sexuality and self" (both M = 3.13). Respondents gave slightly lower average ratings for "gender and friendships"

(M = 3.10) and “relationships involving intimate sexual relations outside of marriage” (M = 2.99). The lowest average ratings were found for the sub-section on “same gender committed relationships” (M = 2.36).

**Figure 2: Mean Ratings for Section IV**



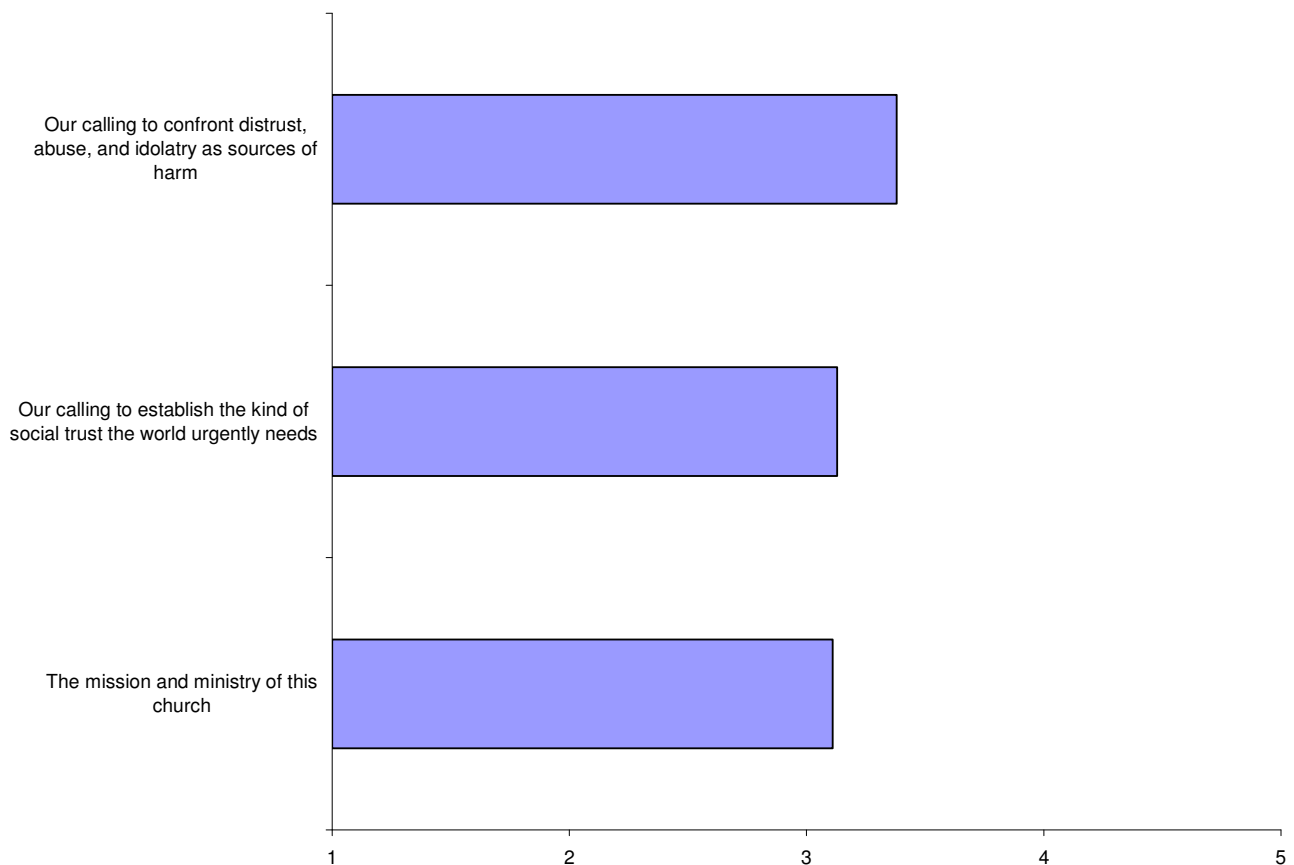
After the rating scale questions, respondents were asked to indicate what, if anything, was a specific strength of Section IV, and 635 comments were given. About one-fourth of respondents to this question liked the emphasis on the importance of families and the protection of children and youth (28%). About 26 percent of respondents felt a strength of this section was the concept of marriage as a relationship of trust and commitment, and ten percent liked the discussion of family beyond the “traditional” one. About nine percent of respondents liked the emphasis on the need for compassion, care and understanding regarding same-sex relationships. Seven percent appreciated the mention of the “ideal” marriage between a man and a woman, and six percent felt this section addressed many topics relating to sexuality. About five percent of respondents liked the mercy concept, and three percent liked the church’s stance against cohabitation and forms of promiscuity. Another three percent felt a strength of the section was the recognition that there is no consensus on same-gender relationships in the church. About two percent of respondents to this question liked the concept that single is good, and one percent liked the emphasis on social influence.

Respondents were also asked to list what, if anything, they would hope to see added to Section IV, and a total of 775 responses were given. About one-fourth of respondents felt there should be more basis in Scripture (27%), and thirteen percent felt marriage should be one man and one woman. About 11 percent felt the section should take a stance on same-gender relationships, and nine percent of

respondents to this question felt the section was too wordy and vague. Eight percent of respondents would like to see the acceptance of homosexuals, and the same number were disappointed in the continued defense of marriage as exclusively heterosexual. About five percent of respondents felt the section should state that homosexuality is a sin, and the same number felt there needed to be clearer definitions of terms like families. Four percent would like to see more about singles and youth, and three percent of respondents would like to see sexual education as an essential part of protecting children. About two percent of respondents would like to see more scientific knowledge about sexual identity, and the same number would like more action items on how the church is going to protect children from the media. Another two percent would like the statement to promote the traditional family as “ideal.” About one percent of respondents would like to see more on divorce and remarriage in this section, and the same number felt this section was trying to “please everyone.”

The last section respondents were asked to rate was Section V in understanding matters of sexuality related to life in society. (See Figure 3.) The highest average ratings were found for “our calling to confront distrust, abuse, and idolatry as sources of harm” (M = 3.38), followed by “our calling to establish the kind of social trust the world urgently needs” (M = 3.13). Slightly lower ratings were found for the sub-section on “the mission and ministry of this church” (M = 3.11).

**Figure 3: Mean Ratings for Section V**



After the rating scale questions, respondents were asked to indicate what, if anything, was a specific strength of Section V, and 326 responses were given. About 26 percent of the respondents to this question felt the section was a good restatement of our call as a church for advocacy and social justice. About 21 percent of respondents felt a strength was the emphasis on commercial sexual exploitation of

children and society. About sixteen percent liked the emphasis on trust, and 11 percent cited lines 1393 to 1397, saying they were encouraged by the inclusion of same-sex couples. Six percent felt this was the strongest section of the draft statement, and about five percent of respondents liked the emphasis on loving our neighbors and reconciliation. Four percent of respondents also specifically liked lines 1367 to 1372 acknowledging the changing dynamic of our church's mission, and three percent felt this section applies to other societal issues, not just sexuality. Another three percent specifically cited lines 1381 to 1385 as a strength, and the same number liked lines 1381 to 1391. Two percent liked the wealth and sexuality section, and one percent of respondents saw the possibility for several resolutions coming out of this section.

Respondents were also asked to list what, if anything, they would hope to see added to Section V, and 414 responses were listed. Over one-third of the respondents to this question (39%) wanted a return to sound, biblical doctrine. About 12 percent felt the section was too vague and wanted more defined statements. About nine percent of respondents felt God's laws should apply to homosexuals, while eight percent felt discrimination by the church against homosexuals hurts the church. Another eight percent felt the section was too long and hard to understand. About five percent felt more should be included about fertility treatments. About four percent of respondents felt this church should uphold, support and affirm all families, and the same number wanted more practical, action-oriented content. Three percent of respondents felt we should allow our witness to transform society, and wanted to add how we can change mass media through actions like boycotts. Another three percent felt there should be less emphasis in this section on the ELCA entering social policies, and more focus on individuals. One percent felt the draft statement should include something beyond what has been said in previous documents. Another one percent of respondents suggested adding a statement of how sex itself can be seen as an idol, and the same number felt we need to support LGBT and questioning youth without judgment.

The final two rating scale questions were broader and asked respondents to rate the draft statement overall. First, respondents were asked how well the statement balances the need to speak to issues in intimate personal relationships with the need to address social issues that are broader and structural. Using a five-point rating scale where 1 = "not very well" and 5 = "very well," respondents were about evenly split between the two extremes. About 34 percent felt the statement did not balance these needs very well (1 or 2 on the scale), while about 38 percent felt the statement did this very well (4 or 5 on the scale). Another 29 percent of respondents were in the middle of the scale, and the mean rating was 2.97.

Respondents were asked to include comments to this question, and 428 responses were given. About one-third of the respondents to this question felt the document was too tentative and vague with no conclusions (37%). Another approximately one-third of the respondents felt the document should be more biblically-based (35%). About nine percent of respondents felt the document struck a good balance of setting a framework without being overbearing, while five percent felt the topic may be too much for one statement. About four percent of the respondents felt social issues predominate and distract, and should be secondary. Three percent appreciated that the statement addressed broader issues than just same-gendered relationships, and the same number felt this was "none of the church's business." About two percent felt the statement needed to address individual sin, and one percent of respondents felt the draft statement was bold in its call to justice advocacy.

Using the same rating scale, respondents were asked how well the draft statement helpfully addresses the needs and questions of all people in this church. Slightly over half of the respondents (55%) felt the statement did not do this very well (1 or 2 on the scale), while about 25 percent felt the statement did

this very well (4 or 5 on the scale). Another 20 percent of responses were in the middle of the scale, and the mean rating was 2.38.

When asked for comments to this question, 585 responses were listed. About one-third of the respondents to this question felt the draft statement should be more biblically-based (32%), and 21 percent felt it was verbose, repetitive and vague. About 15 percent of the respondents felt the draft statement should take a stand. About nine percent of respondents felt the statement could not address the needs of all people in the church, and six percent felt people of same-gender orientation will hesitate to embrace a church that doesn't embrace them. Five percent of respondents encouraged the task force to keep up the good work. About four percent felt the statement excludes single and celibate, same-gender committed relationships and youth, and the same number felt LGBT people were not encouraged by the statement. About two percent of respondents felt some people will see the need for black or white answers on either side, and the same number felt the issue of ordaining homosexuals was not addressed. A final one percent felt the statement should include transgender people.

The last two questions on the response form were open-ended. The first question explained that 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. Respondents were asked to list up to three topics they think it would be essential to include among the implementing resolutions for this social statement.

A total of 956 responses were given to this question about implementing resolutions. About one-third of the respondents felt the social statement should use the Bible and Scripture. About 16 percent would like to see the acceptance of same-sex relationships, and eleven percent suggested a proactive approach to sex education and youth resources. About eight percent of respondents felt *Visions and Expectations* should be updated for LGBT ministers living in partnership, and six percent felt the statement should take a stand on same-sex relationships. Five percent of respondents suggested the removal of practicing homosexuals from the clergy roster, and four percent felt there should be resolutions addressing the commercialization of sex and sexual abuse. Another four percent of respondents felt the statement was flawed and should not be implemented. About three percent of respondents wanted to help advocate tools for families to protect children against Internet pornography and the media, while two percent would like to affirm gender identity and sexual orientation as variety within God's good creation. Another two percent felt there should be an ongoing discussion of sexuality, while one percent of respondents felt the shape of the family and divorce should be addressed. Another one percent would like a simple "yes or no" as to what's right and wrong, and the same number would like a resolution that resolves economic discrepancies and disadvantages of marriage laws for the elderly. About one percent of respondents would like programs for young adults after they graduate from high school. Another one percent of respondents felt there should be a resolution about single people, and the same number felt there should be uniformity in how *Visions and Expectations* is enforced. A final one percent would like a resolution about building and maintaining trust in intimate relationships.

The final question on the response form asked respondents if there was anything else they particularly wanted to share with the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, and 854 comments were listed. Forty-four percent of those responding to this question felt the statement should use the Bible and Scripture. About 14 percent of respondents felt the statement was too long and vague, while the same number thanked the task force for their hard work. About 11 percent felt there should be the same standards for same-sex couples, accepting all people in the church, and seven percent felt the statement should take a stand. About two percent of respondents felt the document is flawed, while the same

number felt the statement needs to address the issue of the ordination of homosexuals. About one percent of respondents expressed concern about youth, and the same number felt the statement should include bisexual and transgender people. Another one percent of respondents would like to see expectations for divorced people, and the same number would like to see the inclusion of scientific data from recent studies of sexuality. Finally, one percent of respondents appreciated the recognition that there is no consensus on same-sex relationships, and the same number liked the focus on love and mercy.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The preliminary responses to the draft statement revealed reactions that were generally very positive or very negative. As can be seen in the responses to the first question, respondents either felt the statement provided a useful framework, or they felt it was not very useful. Very few respondents fell in the middle of the scale. This same split between the extremes was found for the overall rating questions about balancing the need to speak to personal issues versus social issues and addressing the needs of the whole church. As for the specific sections of the document, Section V received the highest overall ratings ( $M = 3.21$ ), followed by Section IV ( $M = 3.13$ ). Respondents found Section III ( $M = 3.04$ ) and Section II ( $M = 2.97$ ) to be slightly less helpful.

Many comments were provided by respondents, and three main themes emerged in response to many of the questions. A large group of respondents felt the draft statement should be more Bible-based, and asked for a return to a “traditional” interpretation of Scripture that is not influenced by society. Many respondents commented on the length of the document, and expressed concern that most lay people would not read it. Finally, a comment mentioned several times was the disappointment that the statement did not “take a stand” on same-sex committed relationships and the ordination of homosexuals. Many felt this was the purpose of the document and felt that the social statement should be clearer on these issues.

Appendix A  
Frequencies (N = 2,077)

**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:*

84.4 This response comes from an individual

15.6 This response comes from a group of individuals who are not responding separately  
If so, how many are in the group? 40.1 2-5 24.1 6-10 25.4 11-20 10.4 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>	<u>Mean</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	
15.7	22.1	28.4	26.9	6.9	2.87

Comments:

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

	<u>Not Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <u>5</u>	<u>Mean</u>
a. Incarnation, justification and serving the neighbor.....	20.9	14.5	19.7	27.7	17.1	3.06
b. Sexual ethics shaped by God’s mercy and compassion.....	25.5	15.7	18.2	25.1	15.5	2.89
c. Living as people of hope.....	18.3	14.2	21.7	26.8	19.0	3.14
d. Scripture and moral discernment.....	29.6	14.3	17.7	23.6	14.9	2.80

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?

	<u>Not Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <u>5</u>	<u>Mean</u>
a. The complexity of individual sexuality.....	21.3	12.8	21.2	26.0	18.6	3.08
b. The social character of sexuality.....	23.0	13.4	21.6	25.2	16.7	2.99

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> <b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <b>5</b>	<u>Mean</u>
a. Strong families: a ground and source of trust.....	14.7	10.6	18.1	31.1	25.4	3.42
b. Protecting children and youth in and for trusting relationships.....	13.1	8.3	15.3	31.8	31.6	3.60
c. Sexuality and self.....	19.3	12.7	22.6	26.9	18.5	3.13
d. Gender and friendships.....	19.5	13.5	23.3	25.2	18.5	3.10
e. Commitment and sexuality.....	21.7	12.2	18.6	26.7	20.8	3.13
f. Marriage.....	19.9	11.9	18.8	26.9	22.4	3.20
g. Relationships involving intimate sexual relations outside of marriage.....	23.0	13.7	21.7	24.3	17.2	2.99
h. Same gender committed relationships.....	42.3	16.1	17.0	12.6	12.0	2.36
i. The necessity of mercy, always.....	19.1	12.3	17.3	24.8	26.5	3.27

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> <b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<u>Very</u> <u>Helpful</u> <b>5</b>	<u>Mean</u>
a. Our calling to establish the kind of social trust the world urgently needs.....	20.4	12.1	20.7	27.8	19.0	3.13
b. Our calling to confront distrust, abuse, and idolatry as sources of harm.....	16.3	9.8	18.6	30.3	24.9	3.38
c. The mission and ministry of this church.....	21.3	12.8	20.6	24.0	21.3	3.11

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>	<u>Mean</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	
14.2	19.7	28.6	30.0	7.5	2.97

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>	<u>Mean</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	
37.3	17.9	20.2	18.3	6.2	2.38

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.

9. Is there anything else you particularly want to share with the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality?