

ELCA Task Force on Genetics

Conference Call/WebEx Meeting of May 3, 2008

Minutes

Present: Per Anderson, Mary Minette, Ted Peters, Richard Perry, Pat Zerega, Robert Lebel, Aana Vigen, Carmelo Santos, Frank Maenpa, Janet Williams, Jerry DeWitt, Judy Klusman, Julette Kahle, Linden Olson, Paul Nelson, Robert Lebel, Robin Mattison, Steve Ullestad, Ron Duty, Roger Willer, Susan Martyn, Sandy Schlesinger.

Excused: Leland Glenna

CO-chair Per Anderson convened the meeting.

Willer reviewed the agenda for the meeting, which was focused on the Writing Team's proposal for a study on genetics, tentatively titled "Faith and Responsibility in the Age of Genetic Intervention." This proposal was created by the team at a meeting on March 29-30, 2008.

Anderson reviewed in general the proposal of the Writing Team (see below), noting that its creation had involved a review of preferences and hopes for the study expressed by task force members and an analysis of several recent studies from Church in Society.

Task force members then commented on the general design and related matters. Some members argued for a different term than "intervention" in the title and various alternatives were suggested. But a final decision on the title was deferred. Since the proposal called for a primer on genetics, Co-chair Janet Williams reported on discussions with the Public Broadcasting System for rights to use a NOVA program called "Cracking the Code of Life." Task force members present were generally interested in this possibility, and discussed various strategies for its use. Williams will continue her discussions with PBS representatives.

Anderson then turned to a detailed discussion of Part A, "Faith Seeking Understanding," of the proposed study. Task force members commented upon and discussed the various proposed sections of Part A. This discussion included reflection on the relation between the sessions of Part A and those in Part B, and how sessions in the two parts could be used together.

Co-chair Janet Williams then reviewed the proposed sessions in Part B, which would be devoted to a series of sessions on specific topics in genetics. Task force members again commented upon and discussed the various proposed sessions. The matters of how to address both pastoral concerns and the use of Scripture were prominent in these discussions.

Willer reviewed the Writing Team's proposed schedule for work on the study (see below), which would be reviewed at the September 12 meeting of the task force in Chicago. Task force members are urged to visit the task force's Blackboard site to review draft material. A revised proposal for the draft based on discussion at this meeting will be available on Blackboard next week. A memo would also be sent out with travel reservation information for the September 12 task force meeting.

Williams adjourned the meeting.

General sketch of:

Faith and Responsibility in the age of genetic intervention
(Working Title)

Contents of study booklet:

Preface & Introduction

Part A: Faith seeking understanding – 5 sessions

Part B: Deliberation on specific arenas – 7 topical sessions

Leader's guide

Glossary

Addendum on the science of genetics; a DVD, perhaps from outside sources, for non-genetic Muggles (non-specialists).

Major dates: see last page for schedule but study due out Nov. 3.

Objectives:

- provide a study that leads ELCA on a journey of faithful discernment
- brings scripture into conversation with the current situation so that it can both shed insight upon that situation and be understood with fresh appreciation
- provide a study that identifies common ground and offers an opportunity for fair deliberation on the controversial matters
- draw upon existing body of social statements while extending their insights
- built on a moral deliberation model
- A study aimed for congregational use – this means, for instance that every session will move inductively and be written the 8th grade level (Chicago Sun Times)
- Others?

Methodological questions underlying the study

- What is going on?
- Who are we in this and what is at stake?
- What are the new questions and challenges posed?
- Where is God in all this?
- How shall we respond?

Session Template

Gathering

Hymn

Prayer

Hearing the Word (dwelling in the Word exercise)

Considering the Word

Responding to Word and World

An illustration of a reality from contemporary life

(Invites people into a description of reality related to genetics to which they can relate and yet moves them beyond their own experience)

Could be:

case study

extended vignette

a dilemma posed

other

Unpacking the reality with its challenges

(Extended discussion of facts, the science, the social implications, etc.)

Tools for faithful engagement;

(i.e., calling upon the resources of faith for reflection)

Unpacking scripture, theology, ethics, and so forth

Note: use existing sources as appropriate

Differing interpretations

(This section primarily for Part B sessions)

An invitation to reflection/moral deliberation – questions for pondering

Closing

Prayer

Part A: Sources and Understandings for Christian Discernment

Session 1: Global Manipulations: Unprecedented Powers and Choices

The Christian moral life is relational, contextual, and responsive. This Session explores “what is going on?” in the world today in various contexts of inquiry, knowledge, and practice related to the genetic science. It will provide an overview of powers and supporting institutions. It will name some of the key challenges, concerns and opportunities of the genetic revolution. It will give study participants an opportunity to discuss their own stories of existential involvement.

Session 2: Caring for Neighbors: Vocation and Affected Communities

The Christian moral life occurs in multiple social roles and places of responsibility: the callings. This Session examines the questions of “why care?” and “who matters?” in the contexts of genetics today. It considers the contributions and predicaments of various participants and stakeholders in the human genetics—researchers and genetics counselors, parents, farmers, consumers, global citizens, and more. It will give study participants an opportunity to expand moral awareness and sensitivity to the many peoples and natural communities affected by genetics and to see the moral significance of the concept of vocation for moral response.

Session 3: Christian Experience and Orientation: Norms from Our Tradition

The Christian moral life responds in gratitude to the experience of God’s grace. The Christian looks to these revelatory experiences for insight into God’s will. This Session begins with reflection upon genetics through key texts of Scripture. It explores the question of “what does the Bible say?” and develops some Lutheran convictions about the use of Scripture in the moral life. Building upon this reflection, the Session also explores the social teaching of the ELCA and sets out concepts, convictions, and norms that may be useful for guiding Christians and all people of good will in their efforts to be responsible persons in the genetics age.

Session 4: God, Creation and Power: Freedom and Accountability in Genetics

The Christian life is conditioned and guided by theological beliefs as well as moral values. This Session explores the questions of “what is God doing?” through the biological processes of genetics, which create and sustain humans and all life, and “what does it mean?” to faith and life that God has created all life as fundamentally genetic. It considers key questions of divine and human power and interaction; brokenness and redemption of humanity and the world; and the promise and limitations of genetic powers to enhance the human body and wider biotic life forms and communities.

Session 5: Toward a Lutheran Ethic for Genetics

Gathering up the insights from the first four sessions to propose key insights for a social statement. This session will be the “hypothesis” for future work.

Part B: Responding to Needs and Questions Today

(Note: Not in any particular order)

Session: Genetics and the congregation

(Particular attention to pastoral and congregational issues and action)

Session : Genetics and identity

(Particular attention to race, social impact and behavior genetics)

Session: Gene testing and screening

(Special attention to pastoral issues here)

Sessions: Genetically Modified Organisms

Session : Stem cells

Session: Genetic patents and economic transfer

(includes issues both of who may be harmed or disadvantaged by the use of genetic technology and also of who may benefit or reap the advantages)

Session: Life extension and gene enhancement

GTF Study writing schedule

- March 29-30 Writing team (WT) meets: works on study concept & structure; common chapter structure; Writing assignments.
- April 26 10 Trial WebEx meeting → topic: how to use WebEx
- April 28 Target for initial draft materials for task force review at May 3rd's meeting
The proposal
A sample chapter from Part A
- May 3 10 a.m. until 1: Task force meeting #4 by Web Ex – considers initial plans for study from WT; initial decisions & assignments made
- May 6 Writing team follow up phone conference
- May-July draft material shared by e-mail or posted on Blackboard for discussion
- Aug. 2 1st draft of study completed → followed by task force comment period
- Aug. 13 Work begins on the “Sept. 12 draft”
- September 1 Study draft posted for Sept. 12 meeting
- Sept. 12-14 Task force meeting #5 – Finalizes study
- Sept 20 WT follow up phone conference
- Sept 28 Task force review of revised draft
- Oct 6 lay out and copy edit begins
- Oct. 13 Text to printer
- Nov. 3 Study published in print & on line for use throughout the church**

