



# GENETICS!

Where Do We Stand as Christians?





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EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

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## Preface

*Genetics! Where Do We Stand As Christians?* The exclamation point and the question mark in the title alert readers that this study explores new and challenging developments. Our society is in the process of trying to understand what the rapidly expanding knowledge about human genes means and to discern what we should do about it. Because we have the scientific and technological ability to do something does not mean we should do it—or should not do it. Christians in company with others need to appraise this new knowledge and power to manipulate genes in light of who we are, what we believe, and what we hold to be good and right.

This study prepares Christians to take on this task in an informed and faithful way. It provides reliable knowledge about genetics, highlights areas of impact and controversy, draws upon the Christian tradition for its perspective, clears away mistaken alternatives, and presents options we face. It helps readers take a stand on genetics as Christians.

*Genetics! Where Do We Stand As Christians?* is meant to encourage learning and moral discourse among members in our church as well as in other church bodies. It is intended for use in congregational forums and other settings where Christians explore the relationship of their faith to everyday life. It also may be used profitably as a resource for individual study. It is not a church policy statement on genetics. The study expresses the commitment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to promote “open-ended deliberation on specific contemporary social concerns without the pressure of legislative decision or community consensus.” (See “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns,” 1997).

This study follows upon and draws considerably upon a book on genetics authorized by the board of the ELCA's Division for Church in Society (DCS). Readers are encouraged to consult that book, *Genetic Testing & Screening: Critical Engagement at the Intersection of Faith and Science*, edited by Roger A. Willer (Minneapolis: Kirk House, 1998), for more extensive treatment of many of the issues in this study. Readers may also want to consult another related study produced by DCS: *Human Cloning: Papers from a Church Consultation* (2001), also edited by Willer. Ordering information on these two resources may be found on page 67.

Rev. Willer brings his experience with these two projects to author this study. Willer, a member of Reformation Lutheran Church in Eastlake, Ohio, has served as an Associate of Studies in the ELCA's Division for Church in Society during the production of this study. He is a doctoral candidate in theology at the University of Chicago. DCS thanks Mark Buckheim, Robert R. Lebel, Scott Nichols, Laurie Ryan, Charles Smith, and Deon Stuthman, who read and commented on drafts of this study. The Division is also grateful to the following congregations and their leaders who tested this material in discussion forums: John Haselow and Hope Lutheran, Cleveland Heights, Ohio; Jim Hildreth and St. Paul Lutheran, Villa Park, Illinois; Debra Johnson and Good Shepherd Lutheran, Alexandria, Virginia; Steve Shrider and Zion Lutheran Church, Clarence, New York; and Charles Smith and Trinity Lutheran, Newport News, Virginia. The generous efforts of these people have significantly strengthened the final product.