



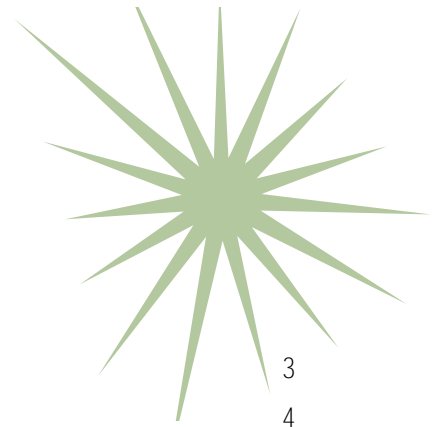
*A workshop to help you gain practical
experience in ethical decision making*



Called to
**ethical
decision making**

No easy answers

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Purpose

Learning to discuss issues that stir strong emotions is the first step toward making ethical decisions. The more complex the issue, the more difficult the decision. Moral deliberation is not a quick and easy process. There isn't always an easy answer, and there usually isn't only one answer.

This workshop will help you gain confidence and practical experience in ethical decision making. Through reflection on your own experiences, you will learn a problem-posing approach that involves paying attention to the reality and experiences of others. This process will be demonstrated by addressing the issue of homosexuality.

To the leader

This workshop can be completed in 2 or 2½ hours. It can also be done in two separate sessions (covering parts 1 and 2 in the first session and parts 3 and 4 in the second session). The times suggested for each part are approximate. Before the group meets, become familiar with all of the concepts and activities. You will want to create a safe environment for the sharing of different viewpoints.

Materials needed

- Copies of the handouts for each participant
- Overhead transparencies as noted
- Bibles (one for each participant), newsprint, and markers
- Newsprint on which the "Helps to Guide Our Discussions" have been printed
- Blank paper for learning journals for participants (optional)

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introduction *10 minutes*

welcome

LEADER: *“Thank you for coming. This promises to be an intense workshop but one that we hope you will find to be both educationally and spiritually rewarding. At the end of the workshop, we hope you will have acquired some new understandings of what it means to live and act ethically.”*

opening prayer

Loving and compassionate God, help us to open our hearts to all our neighbors. Help us to listen to each other with patience and understanding in order to become more effective instruments for your justice here on earth. Help us to learn from one another and gather strength from our collective wisdom. Give us the insights and the ability to discern your will. Extend your blessings on our community assembled here, and help us to remember in all we do during our time together that what binds us to each other is your unconditional love for each one of us. In the name of Jesus. Amen

review of goals for the workshop

OVERHEAD: “Goals for the Workshop”

See the list of the goals for the workshop. Elaborate a bit on the meaning of each.

overview of the agenda

HANDOUT: “Agenda”

Distribute and summarize the workshop agenda. Point out tentative time frames.

helps to guide our discussions

HANDOUT: “Helps to Guide Our Discussions”

Prior to the workshop, you may wish to post these helps on newsprint so that they are visible throughout the workshop. Participants may wish to keep a “learning journal” during the workshop, jotting down thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concerns as they surface.

LEADER: *“We will be working with some complex issues. These helps are meant to guide us and to keep before us the understanding that we are indeed all valued members of the community of believers.”*



understanding ethics *50 minutes*

some common definitions

HANDOUT: *"Ethics: What Is It?"*

Distribute the handout, explaining that it contains ways in which others have defined ethics. Point out that in this workshop we are seeking to address the last question on the page, especially as it relates to our own Christian and Lutheran perspective.

a moral dilemma

HANDOUT: "The Archbishop and the Chambermaid: An Exercise in Ethical Decision Making"

This exercise is intended to give preliminary practice in moral deliberation and to reinforce the fact that moral deliberation is not usually a quick and easy process.

Distribute the handout titled "The Archbishop and the Chambermaid," and ask participants to gather in groups of four or five to discuss the scenario and the accompanying questions. After groups reassemble, ask them to share a few responses to the questions. Ask them what they learned about the process of moral deliberation. Note that there isn't always an easy answer, and there usually isn't only one answer.

overview: the varieties of ethical frameworks

HANDOUTS: "Varieties of Ethical Frameworks: A Continuum"
"Ethical Frameworks: A Continuum" (the diagram)

OVERHEAD: "Ethical Frameworks: A Continuum"

LEADER: *"Now that we have examined the basic meaning of the term ethics and have had a bit of practice in moral deliberation, we can move on to discuss the various ethical frameworks or value systems that inform the process of moral deliberation. When we make our ethical decisions, we are operating within some sorts of ethical constructs, whether we are conscious of them or not. The reality is that people operate from a whole spectrum of ethical frameworks, whether they are secular or religious. Let's briefly examine those."*

Distribute the handout "Varieties of Ethical Frameworks: A Continuum" and the accompanying diagram of the continuum. Using the graphic depiction on the overhead, summarize and discuss the continuum. Give participants a moment to think about where they see themselves on this continuum. Might they have operated out of different frameworks at other points in their lives? What might have caused the change?



focus: the Lutheran ethical approach

HANDOUT: "Key Concepts in Luther's Ethics"

OVERHEAD: "Key Concepts in Luther's Ethics"

LEADER: "So now we know that the historical Lutheran ethical approach combines both the 'absolutist' and the 'consequentialist' sides of an ethical framework. Now we'll explore this Lutheran approach further."

Distribute the handout "Key Concepts in Luther's Ethics." It, together with the accompanying overhead, may be used as the basis for a short lecture.

how Lutherans approach Scripture

HANDOUTS: "How Lutherans Approach Scripture"

"An Exercise in Approaching Scripture"

OVERHEAD: "Factors to Consider When Studying Scripture"

LEADER: "Because Lutherans are guided in their ethical decision making by Scripture, their own experience, and insights gained from the disciplines of learning, it is crucial to have a basic understanding of how Lutherans approach Scripture."

Use the handout "How Lutherans Approach Scripture" and the overhead "Factors to Consider When Studying Scripture" to elaborate on the key points.

Distribute the handout "An Exercise in Approaching Scripture." Divide participants into groups of four or five. Assign each group one or two of the passages on the handout, and ask them to use the questions on the handout as a guide for their discussion of the passages.

Reassemble the group for a brief discussion of their comments and insights.

break 5 minutes

engaging in ethical reasoning *50 minutes*

LEADER: *“In this part, we will integrate many things we have learned so far. Now it’s time to get some practical experience in ethical reasoning. We will be addressing homosexuality, a highly complex and controversial issue. We will not expect, in the short period of time we have, to come up with all of the answers or to make final ethical pronouncements related to this issue. Instead, we hope to gain an understanding of how to address complex ethical issues in a serious and deliberate way.”*

some things to remember about ethical reasoning

HANDOUT: “Some Factors Concerning Ethical Reasoning”

Distribute the handout “Some Factors Concerning Ethical Reasoning.” Briefly summarize the list of factors, pointing out that remembering these factors will be useful as we begin our moral deliberation.

small-group deliberation on the issue of homosexuality

HANDOUT: “Homosexuality”

Divide participants into groups of no more than six people. Give each group the handout “Homosexuality,” which includes the ethical question to be addressed, a case study, background information, a brief reflection on scriptural passages, and a list of suggested questions. Allow 5 minutes for group members to read the materials individually (or you may wish briefly to summarize the information contained in the handout). The group should then take about 25 minutes to discuss the scenario and the ethical question “Should homosexuality be used as a reason to deny employment?” Remind the group that they are deliberating from the standpoint of a school board member. Periodically check in with each group and be available for questions.

LEADER: *“Keep in mind the ‘Helps to Guide Our Discussions’ posted on the newsprint. There will no doubt be differing opinions as we engage in this process. Please designate one person to serve as group facilitator to ensure that the group stays on target through the process as outlined in the materials. Also ask one person to serve as reporter. That person should be prepared to summarize the deliberative process of the group.”*

sharing the results of our deliberation

When groups reconvene, ask the reporters to give a brief summary of the group work, followed by general discussion. Allow about 15 minutes for this activity. Use guided questions like these:

- *What were the easiest and most difficult parts of the deliberative process?*
- *What were the most important things you learned from the process?*
- *Was there consensus on what the final decision might be?*

conclusion *10 minutes*

closing prayer

Dear Lord,

You are always in our future, beckoning us toward a reign of justice we are not sure we want to reach. We think of the things that are past and wish you would give us, again, that with which we were comfortable. Thank you for the assurance that you are always with us as we make those difficult decisions that as Christians we must make for the sake of love and justice. Give us also the courage to follow your leading into the future, striving always to love as you have loved. In your name we pray. Amen

evaluation

Distribute the evaluation form and ask participants to complete it before they leave.





goals for the workshop

This workshop will

- provide an overview of various ethical frameworks and value systems;
- offer an analysis of the Lutheran ethical approach and provide guidelines for examining social issues within a Lutheran context;
- help participants to gain confidence and experience in moral deliberation within the community of faith;
- help participants understand the complexities involved in ethical reasoning and decision making;
- give opportunities for participants to understand and appreciate one another while exploring ethical issues.

This workshop will *not*

- provide absolute answers to complex ethical questions.



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agenda

1 introduction

- Welcome
- Opening prayer
- Review of goals for the workshop
- Overview of the agenda
- Helps to guide our discussions

2 understanding ethics

- Some common definitions
- A moral dilemma
- Overview: The varieties of ethical frameworks
- Focus: The Lutheran ethical approach
- How Lutherans approach Scripture

3 engaging in ethical reasoning

- Some things to remember about ethical reasoning
- Small-group deliberation on the issue of homosexuality
- Sharing the results of our deliberation

4 conclusion

- Closing prayer
- Evaluation



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helps to guide our discussions

We as the people of God have never had all of the answers to life's questions, but we are committed to trusting in God and depending on each other for care and comfort as we discern God's will for us in complex situations.

Some things to keep in mind as we proceed:

- **We are guided by a concept of shared wisdom.** No one of us has all of the wisdom. Each of us, however, has a piece of the wisdom. Every one of us has a different piece of the wisdom. Therefore, we encourage all participants to work hard to share ideas and to begin to think in new ways. No one, however, will be forced to share or to speak.
- **We listen carefully to each other,** not to win arguments but so that we can better understand other people and the issue at hand.
- **We can agree to disagree.** Everyone's opinion is respected, and every person's dignity is affirmed.
- **We observe the common courtesies of discussion.** We don't interrupt others or dominate the discussion. We acknowledge our own feelings and avoid judgmental language. We give feedback and speak only for ourselves and not for others.
- **We remember what binds us together:** our unity in Christ and our care and concern for each other as a community of believers.



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ethics: what is it?

American Heritage Dictionary definition

ethics: the moral quality of a course of action; any set of moral principles or values; the study of the general nature of morals and of the specific moral choices to be made by the individual in his [or her] relationship with others.

A definition synthesizing the views of various ethicists

Ethics deals with the choices we make about how to live. It asks the question, "What course of life is best?"

Our work in this part is based on this question:

"Within the context of my Christian perspective, and in the circumstances in which I live, what is the right thing for me to do?"



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the archbishop and the chambermaid —an exercise in ethical decision making

William Godwin, in an essay titled “The Archbishop and the Chambermaid,” cites the situation of an archbishop and his chambermaid who are trapped in his burning palace. He poses this question: If only one of the two could be rescued, which one should it be?

In your small group, assume that you are the rescuer and that you must make the decision. As you decide what to do, consider the following questions:

- What is the key ethical question in this situation?
- What are the ethical standards that would guide you?
- What are your possible alternatives?
- What would be the consequences of each alternative? For you? For society?
- What if the chambermaid was your mother? What if the archbishop was your brother?
- How might your own prejudices affect your decision?
- On what values would you base your decision?



varieties of ethical frameworks

a continuum

To understand various ethical frameworks, it is helpful to look at their location on a continuum. This view involves generalizations, and there are many shadings across the continuum. Nevertheless, it provides an overview of the range of ethical perspectives out of which most people operate.

The continuum places ethical frameworks into two main categories:

- those that view ethics and values as absolutes
- those that recognize the ambiguities involved in ethical decision making

The difference between the two ends of the continuum are captured in this question raised by philosopher Peter Singer: "Do we judge actions as right or wrong on the basis of their compliance with rules or principles, irrespective of consequences, or on the basis of their producing the best consequences?"

On one end of the continuum are those ethical frameworks described as *absolutist*. On the other end are those called *consequentialist*. In the center are those ethical constructs that combine elements of both ends of the continuum. Both ends of this continuum are present within Lutheranism, Catholicism, and other Christian denominations.

an absolutist approach to ethics

On one end of the ethical continuum is decision making based on *compliance with rules and principles*. Natural law, moral law, moral rights, codes, rules, regulations, principles, and loyalty to something outside of self are important. Absolutist frameworks are legalistic: ethics and values as seen as absolutes.

At the absolutist extreme are groups like the Christian Reconstructionists, who believe that Christians should conform to Old Testament law instead of to principles of reason, justice, and love. Also found on this end of the continuum are those who adhere to a literal interpretation of the Bible and understand the Bible as containing all the answers to ethical questions. But many secular ethicists also operate with an absolutist approach. Immanuel Kant, for example, said that it is always wrong to tell a lie: even if the lie doesn't harm any particular person, it harms humankind in general, because it corrupts the source of the law itself.

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varieties of ethical frameworks: a continuum *(continued)*

a consequentialist approach to ethics

The other end of the continuum incorporates a process of ethical decision making in which the possible *consequence* of the decision is considered. The person making the decision might consider, for example, the decision's impact on self and others, whether the decision would have a pleasurable outcome, whether the decision expressed love, or whether the decision preserved relationships.

At the consequentialist extreme are the *antinomians*, who operate with no principles or maxims or rules. Instead, they rely on each individual situation to provide an ethical solution. Some ethicists on this end of the continuum take a *utilitarian* approach, making decisions on the basis of what is best for the largest number of people. Others, like Joseph Fletcher, who at one time considered himself a Christian, argue for a *situationalist* approach, in which the major question to be considered is, "What is the balance between the good to be achieved and the harm to be avoided?" Love, rather than rules, forms the basis for decision making.

a "middle" approach to ethics

The "middle" approach contains elements from both ends of the continuum. This approach recognizes that one must consider some absolutes and principles when making ethical choices, but at the same time, one must also consider the circumstances and ambiguities of the situation.

Fitting into this middle approach are Christian ethicists like Paul Ramsey who believe that the ethical core of Christianity is "obedient love." These ethicists use Jesus as a model who established the ethic of love but did not lay down legalistic precepts. Martin Luther's ethical approach is consistent with this thinking as well. He believed that although a universal "ought" exists, representing God's "good and gracious will," the message of the gospel is that the love of Christ overcomes legalism. For Luther, ethical decision making involved striving for justice, using reason tempered with love.



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_____ ethical frameworks: a continuum _____
an absolutist approach a consequentialist approach

- Insists that decisions comply with rules and principles
- Sees ethics and values as absolutes
- Bases decisions on natural law, moral law, codes, regulations

- a "middle" approach
- Allows that some absolutes and principles apply
 - Recognizes ambiguities
 - Considers circumstances and consequences

- Considers consequences
- Allows for ambiguity
- Looks at impact on self and others
- Does not consider rules and laws to be paramount



Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers

key concepts in Luther's ethics

the kingdom of God

Central to Luther's ethical framework is his understanding of the kingdom of God. Luther believed that God intends the universe to be free from oppression and evil. This kingdom of God, ushered in by Jesus, embodies an ethic of wholeness, justice, and fullness of life. We are God's partners in the world, promoting love, justice, and the well-being of creation. Our ethical choices will reflect that vision of the reign of God.

the gospel core

Luther understood the gospel as the proclamation of unconditional love that God expressed through Jesus. When we accept this love, we reach out and show love to others. Our certainty about God's love enables us to live with the ambiguities of life and to risk making ethical decisions even when we don't have conclusive answers. We accept the freedom to love our neighbor and care for all of God's creation. Our ethical choices are based on that gospel understanding.

our call to obedience

According to Luther, at the same time that we are recipients of God's unconditional love, we are also influenced by the powers of evil in the world and within ourselves. Therefore structures and laws are necessary, both for the preservation of God's good world and for the hindrance of evil. As Christians, we live out of an ethic of love, while simultaneously living within those structures of law designed to give order to creation and to curb evil influences. Luther understood, however, that at times it may be necessary to break the law for the sake of love. Our call to obedience is based on principles of reason and justice, as embodied in the Ten Commandments.

love and justice

Love and justice are two of the most important concepts embodied in the gospel and in Luther's ethic. Faith active in love is the foundation of the Lutheran ethic. The reign of God, for Luther, is a reign of justice. It is founded on the belief that each person is equally loved by God and is therefore entitled to what is necessary for life. Our ethical choices reflect the principles of love and justice.

a Lutheran approach to ethical decision making

Luther, and Lutherans historically, have used three tools to inform ethical decisions: Scripture and tradition, human experience, and insights from the disciplines of learning.



key concepts in Luther's ethics

the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God, ushered in by Jesus, embodies an ethic of wholeness, justice, and fullness of life.

the gospel core

The gospel is the proclamation of unconditional love that God has expressed to us through Jesus.

our call to obedience

As Christians we live out of an ethic of love, while at the same time living within structures of law designed to give order to creation and to curb evil influences.

love and justice

Love and justice are two of the most important concepts embodied in the gospel and in Luther's ethic.

a Lutheran approach to ethical decision making

Lutherans use three tools to inform ethical decisions: Scripture and tradition, human experience, and insights gained from the disciplines of learning.



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how Lutherans approach Scripture

Lutherans believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that it touches on universal themes that we experience and live today. Lutherans believe that God continues to be revealed in history and to act through history.

Tools that inform our ethical decisions:

1. Scripture and the Christian tradition
2. Human experience—personal experience, experience within the community of faith, and experiences in the world
3. Insights from the disciplines of learning

As we study Scripture, our inquiry is enriched by insights from human experience and the disciplines of learning. The use of all three tools helps us understand God's will as we struggle with the knotty, controversial, and personally difficult issues of our time.

factors to consider when studying Scripture

the gospel core

For Lutherans, Christ is the key to the Scripture. We read the Scripture through the lens of the gospel message of God's unconditional love. We accept that Jesus is the bearer of this free gift of love, and not a moral teacher who imposes legalistic rules. Within the gospel we find an overall message of love and justice for the vulnerable. Luther read and judged all Scripture in the light of Jesus Christ. He even referred to the letter of James, with its emphasis on good works, as a "letter of straw" because he felt it didn't convey the central message of the gospel.

the laws that still apply

Which of the biblical laws are still in force? Luther believed that laws must order creation and society according to the principles of reason and justice, as do the Ten Commandments. We assess the laws in the Bible according to how they express our relationship with a loving God.

the cultural husk and the theological kernel

The Bible was written 2,000–3,000 years ago and reflects cultural views different from ours today. In interpreting Scripture as it relates to contemporary issues, we must

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Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers

how Lutherans approach Scripture *(continued)*

separate the prescientific and cultural husks of Scripture from the theological kernels pertaining to eternal themes that we understand, trust, and live by today. Again, we see these themes through the prism of Jesus and his proclamation of the reign of God. St. Paul, for example, speaks from a first-century patriarchal worldview. His attitudes about women and slavery reflect that worldview. Yet he speaks with power to our human experience.

the lessons of modern knowledge and experience

In approaching Scripture, as we search for what it means to act faithfully within our own context, we draw on current knowledge and experience. Although Jesus, throughout his ministry, treated women with respect, attitudes toward women in the Bible were often paternalistic and even dehumanizing. Campaigns for women's suffrage and other rights have led to greater freedom and equality for women over time, but work remains before God's reign of justice, pointed to in Galatians 3:28, is fulfilled.

the key question

Lutherans view the Bible as the story of a relationship, not merely as a summary of rules and laws. We have a relationship with God through Jesus, and it is this relationship that informs our actions and decisions. The key question, then, as we search Scripture for guidance in ethical decision making is this: **How does what we read in the Bible reflect the nature of our relationship with God as expressed through Jesus?**

As we struggle to make ethical decisions, we are called to be *humble*, remembering that our reason is influenced by our own cultural biases. We never have a total grasp of the truth.

As we struggle to make ethical decisions, we
are called to be humble.





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an exercise in approaching Scripture

How do you use Scripture when you are considering contemporary ethical issues? Look at the scriptural references assigned to your small group. After you have read the passages, discuss the following questions:

Is there a “cultural husk” in this passage? If so, what is it?

Is there a “theological kernel” in this passage? If so, what is it?

What is the context in which this passage occurs?

Does this passage contain a law that still has meaning for us today?

How does this passage relate to the gospel message of love and justice?

Are there any insights from contemporary disciplines of learning and our contemporary experiences that can help us evaluate this passage?

How might our interpretation of this passage be influenced by our own cultural biases?

Exodus 21:20–21. When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner’s property.

Ephesians 6:5. Slaves, obey your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ.

1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.

Galatians 3:26, 28. For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Numbers 5:11–28 (summarized here). If a man suspects that his wife is unfaithful, he should bring her to the priest, who in a ritual will give her a potion to drink. If she is guilty, “her womb shall discharge, her uterus drop,” and she shall be cursed among her people. If she is innocent, she will be immune from the effects of the potion and will be able to bear children.

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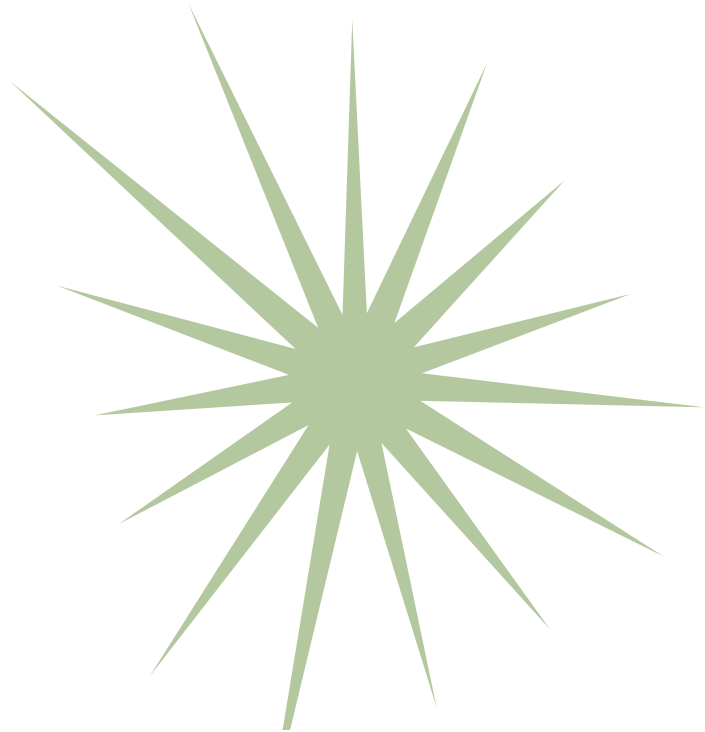
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an exercise in approaching Scripture *(continued)*

Deuteronomy 23:1–3. No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.

Micah 6:8. He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Genesis 1: 26, 27, 31. Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image. . . . male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.





factors to consider when studying Scripture

the gospel core

Lutherans read Scripture through the lens of the gospel message of God's unconditional love and acceptance in Jesus.

the laws that still apply

We assess the laws in the Bible by considering how they express our relationship with a loving God.

the cultural husk and the theological kernel

We separate the prescientific and cultural husks of Scripture from the theological kernels concerning eternal themes that we can understand, trust, and live by today.

the lessons of modern knowledge and experience

We draw on current knowledge and experience as we search the Scripture for how we should act faithfully within our own context.

the key question

How does what we read in the Bible reflect the nature of our relationship with God as expressed through Jesus?



Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers

some factors concerning ethical reasoning

Most ethical decisions have *multiple alternatives*.

Most ethical decisions have extended *consequences*, and often uncertain consequences. No decision is without its consequences.

Most ethical decisions have *personal implications*.

Ethical reasoning is a *complex process*. It is easy to do poor work in ethical deliberation. Because no scientific tools are involved and because objective verification is not possible, we can appear to be thinking logically and critically, even when we are not. Difficult problems do not have quick and easy solutions.

Our own reasoning process is influenced by *our own cultural background and experience*, as well as by our existential, personal involvement in an issue.

The *facts are never just the facts*. They are influenced by our experiences.

In making ethical decisions, we must *understand the viewpoint of others* involved in and directly affected by the situation.

In making ethical decisions, we must seek to understand conflicting values and not overlook complex issues. *Multiple ambiguities* are generally involved.



homosexuality

I. An ethical question:

“Should homosexuality be used as a reason to deny employment?”

II. A scenario

The superintendent of a local school district recently received a letter from a group of clergy in the community asking his opinion concerning the hiring of homosexual teachers. The superintendent replied that no policy was in effect, that questions of sexual preference were not asked in the application process, and that it was the school board's responsibility to deal with such issues. Subsequently the same group of clergy asked the school board to institute a policy in which homosexuality would be used as a reason to deny employment to teachers. The board agreed to consider their request.

Mary, a teacher at the school for 20 years, has a personal interest in the decision the school board is about to make. The superintendent and his predecessors have given Mary consistently excellent performance evaluations, and she has a reputation in the community as an outstanding teacher. Since she came to town 20 years ago, her roommate has been her friend, Joan, who teaches in a nearby school district. Townsfolk have been known to refer to Mary and Joan as “the two ‘old maid’ schoolteachers who live on the corner.” What the townsfolk don't know is that Mary and Joan are sexual partners.

You are a member of the school board. What will your position be?

III. Some background information on homosexuality

Understanding the terminology. There is a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity. *Homosexual orientation* refers to predominant sexual attraction to people of the same sex. It has been estimated that between 5 and 10 percent of people are same-sex oriented. *Homosexual activity* is sexual activity with a person of the same sex. Female homosexuals are commonly referred to as lesbians, while male homosexuals are commonly known as gays.

Possible causes of homosexuality. Possible causes of homosexuality are the focus of considerable research and speculation. Opinions are divided. It wasn't until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Some scholars suggest that homosexuality is a learned behavior. Others hold that a person's sexual orientation may be influenced during critical periods in

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homosexuality *(continued)*

childhood or early adolescence. Still others wonder whether the nature of relationships with parents, friends, and others might be a causative factor. Some scientists believe that heterosexuality and homosexuality are caused by a combination of factors both before and after birth that may not be exactly the same for any two people, and that sexual orientation is essentially fixed by the time a child is three years old.

Ongoing scientific research in the past few years appears to support the idea that sexual orientation is shaped by innate physiological and biological factors. A study by Richard Green found that 70 percent of the boys in the study who were described as “effeminate” grew up to be gay. Neuroscientist Simon LeVay discovered that a tiny part of the hypothalamus, which governs the sex drive, is smaller in homosexual men than in heterosexual men. J. Michael Bailey and Richard C. Pillard, in a study of lesbians and their sisters, found that 48 percent of identical twin sisters of lesbians were also lesbian, compared to 16 percent of non-identical twins. This study corroborated earlier studies done on male homosexual twins.

Can sexual orientation be changed? The spectrum includes those who believe that homosexuality is a conscious choice and those who believe that it is an immutable physiological fact. Most therapists agree, however, that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change exclusive homosexuality to fully functional heterosexuality. It may be easier for bisexuals and heterosexuals to turn to homosexual encounters.

The homosexual lifestyle. Opinions differ on whether the overt expression of erotic sexuality on the part of homosexuals is essential to their psychological wholeness. Some theologians and ethicists encourage celibacy. Others, including some Lutheran ethicists, argue that *enforced* celibacy (not *voluntary* celibacy) is inconsistent with God’s intent that men and women be in personal and communal relationships.

IV. Looking at Scripture: A brief reflection

When looking at Scripture for guidance about homosexuality or any other controversial social issue, we should keep in mind the Lutheran ethical approach, with its emphasis on an ethic of wholeness, justice, and fullness of life embodied in the reign of God; the centrality of the gospel proclamation of God’s unconditional love; and the call to obedience based on reason and justice. It is equally important to weigh what Scripture says by separating the “cultural husks” from the “theological kernels” and to understand the

(continued)



homosexuality *(continued)*

entire context, both cultural and historical, of the Scripture. The key question always is: *“How does what we read in the Bible reflect the nature of our relationship with God as expressed through Jesus?”*

It may be surprising to learn that only six or seven passages in the Bible directly address homosexuality. Of these, two are most often cited as admonitions against homosexuality. Read these two selections and keep in mind their historical and cultural background and context.

Genesis 19:1–11

A purely homosexual interpretation of the story of Sodom is relatively recent. Many scholars conclude that the basic sin of Sodom was its outrageous lack of hospitality to strangers, evidenced in the attempted homosexual rape. Sources from ancient Egypt and Assyria suggest that conquerors practiced homosexual rape in order to brutalize, degrade, and control the vanquished. Later biblical references to the sin of Sodom display varying understandings of this sin. Isaiah (1:10, 3:9) says that Sodom’s sin was its injustice. Jeremiah (23:14) accuses Sodom of adultery, lying, and failure to repent. Ezekiel (16:49) says that Sodom’s sin was pride, gluttony, prosperous ease, and failure to aid the poor and needy. Jesus refers to Sodom in the context of possible inhospitality to his disciples, whom he is sending on a mission tour, and says that it will be better for Sodom in the day of judgment than for those who turn their backs on Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 10:14–15; Luke 10:10–12).

Romans 1:26–27

In this passage St. Paul decries same-sex activity in Roman culture. The passage should be seen in its context, in which Paul is condemning the Gentiles for their idolatry. He says that monotheism was known to the Romans, but they rejected it (Romans 1:19–20). Paul argues that when we forsake the true God for idols, our whole life becomes idolatrous. He stresses that *all* humanity is under the judgment of God. His argument culminates in Romans 2, in which he says that when we self-righteously stand in judgment against others, we are appropriating the role of God as judge, and by taking the place of God, we, too, are idolaters. St. Paul was repulsed by the degeneracy of his time. His abhorrence of homosexual conduct is only one example of a whole range of actions that he perceived as being under God’s wrath. Because of his cultural

(continued)



homosexuality *(continued)*

context, he assumes that all people are by nature heterosexual, and that homosexuality therefore violates the natural order of things.

Other passages referring to homosexuality:

Leviticus 18:22

Leviticus 20:13

1 Corinthians 6:9–10

1 Timothy 1:8–11

Keep in mind the cultural and historical context as you review these passages. Look for the “theological kernels” and reflect on how these passages relate to the gospel message of love and justice.

V. Suggested questions

As you deliberate possible responses to the scenario described above, consider the following questions:

What are the key ethical issues involved?

What ambiguities can you identify?

What are the possible alternatives?

What might be the consequences of each alternative?

How would you react if you were Mary? Joan?

If your pastor was among the clergy who asked for a policy, what do you think might be his or her reasoning?

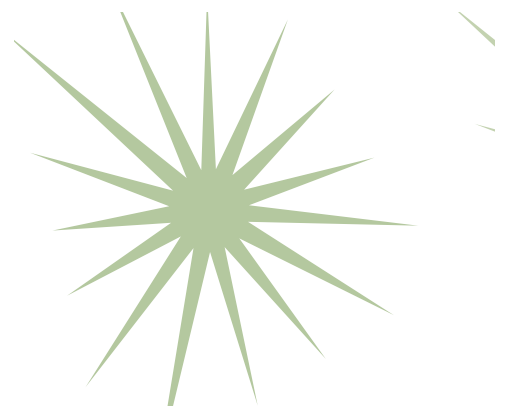
How might your own experiences affect your deliberation? How would your deliberation be affected if you had a homosexual daughter? If you yourself were homosexual?

Does the background information on homosexuality given above inform your deliberation?

Does Scripture offer guidance? If so, in what way?

How does the Lutheran ethical approach help you to reach a decision?

If you were a member of the school board, what might be your response to the request of the clergy? What would be the rationale for your position?





Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers

evaluation

Please respond to the following statements by assigning each a number from 1 to 5 (1 being the least positive response and 5 being the most positive response).

- 1.** This workshop has helped me to understand various ethical frameworks and value systems.

1 2 3 4 5

- 2.** I now have a better understanding of how to address ethical issues within the context of a Lutheran ethical approach.

1 2 3 4 5

- 3.** I gained confidence in my ability to engage in moral deliberation.

1 2 3 4 5

- 4.** I have a greater appreciation for the complexities involved in ethical reasoning and decision making.

1 2 3 4 5

- 5.** This workshop helped me to understand and appreciate the viewpoint of others.

1 2 3 4 5

(continued)



Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers

evaluation *(continued)*

Please respond to the following questions:

1. What portions of this workshop were the most meaningful to you? Please explain.

2. What portions were the least useful to you? Please explain.

3. What suggestions would you have for improving this workshop in the future?

Please circle the number that best describes your overall evaluation of this workshop, with 1 as the lowest rating and 5 as the highest rating.

1 2 3 4 5

Please add any other comments you may have.

Thank you!

Women of the ELCA resources

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notes

A large, empty rectangular area with a light green background, intended for taking notes.



Called to Ethical Decision Making is one program in the Listen, God Is Calling series produced by the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to help women's groups explore together what God is calling them to be and do.

credits

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