

2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly
Aug. 17-23, 2009 • Minneapolis Convention Center
“God’s work. Our hands.”

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- Adopted proposal for further development of a Lutheran Malaria Initiative
- Endorsed \$10 million fund raising proposal for HIV and AIDS strategy
- Adopted full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church
- Adopted Proposed Social Statement on Justice for Women
- Adopted **Social Statement - “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**

What Does This Mean...for the Congregations and People of the IN-KY Synod?

*Prepared and distributed by the Office of Bishop James R. Stuck,
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Social Statement – “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust”

This tenth social statement adopted by the ELCA, like all such social statements, articulates a distinctly Lutheran response to current social realities and concerns. Social statements of the ELCA are not binding on the individual consciences of ELCA members, but rather serve as guide for policies and practices of the church and foundation for addressing the stated issues in the public square.

A range of topics are covered in this statement, including marriage, family, protecting children, sexuality, friendship, commitment, adult cohabitation, social responsibility. Most attention has been given to “Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.”

A few snippets from that section of the document:

This church...

- opposes all forms of verbal or physical harassment and assault based on sexual orientation;
- supports legislation and policies to protect civil rights and to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, and public services;
- calls upon congregations to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection;
- acknowledges that consensus does not exist concerning how to regard same-gender committed relationships;
- does not have agreement on whether this church should honor these relationships, uplift, shelter, and protect them or on how it is appropriate to do so;
- seeks responsible actions that serve others and do so with humility and deep respect for the conscience-bound beliefs of others;
- on the basis of “the bound conscience,” will include these different under standings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world;
- encourages people to live out faith in the local and global community of the baptized with respect for the conscience-bound belief of the neighbor;
- calls for mutual respect in relationships and for guidance that seeks the good of each individual and of the community; and
- commits itself to continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.

Recommendation on Ministry Policies

Four recommendations were adopted regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and the rostering of people in such relationships. These recommendations call for action on the part of the various expressions of the ELCA. In some ways, they attempt to provide ways for the church to express commitments and perspectives articulated in the social statement in its own policies and practices.

1. In the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commits itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.

This focus on bearing each other's burdens, loving our neighbor, and respecting one another's conscience (when consciences are bound to differing conclusions by scripture, tradition, and reason) takes seriously St. Paul's assertions that the body of Christ may be wounded by deep differences and that in the grace of God underneath these differences we are nevertheless one in Christ. As scripture remind us through these wounds the goodness and glory of God can be made known. Bearing one another's burdens, loving one another, and respecting others' bound, yet differing, conscience may be means of this grace among individuals, within congregations, and among the expressions of this church.

2. The ELCA commits itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

The social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" calls on all members and congregations of the ELCA to care for and support same-gender couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection. This resolution does not require any congregation to do anything to recognize, support, or hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships liturgically or in other aspects of its life as a congregation. This resolution does provide permission for congregations who sense a call to formally recognize and hold accountable such relationships to find ways to do so.

3. The ELCA commits itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.

Very little about the processes of candidacy and rostering is likely to change. Following the processes outlined in Resolution #4 the church will provide publicly accountable ways in which people in the relationships described may enter into these processes and, if approved, be considered for call and rostering. Note that it is not the practice of this church to force congregations to call rostered leaders that they discern are not appropriate leaders for them. Synod offices, and bishops, will continue to honor the bound consciences of congregations while engaging in genuine discernment with one another.

4. The fourth recommendation has 8 "resolved" sections that were adopted:

(The following has been edited. Find the full document at www.elca.org.)

- a. ELCA calls upon its members to commit themselves to respect the *bound consciences* of those with whom they disagree regarding decisions on the call and rostering of individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, in this church and with churches ecumenically and globally;
- b. ELCA declares its intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making regarding the approving or disapproving in candidacy and the extending or not extending of a call to rostered service of a person who is otherwise qualified and who is living or contemplates living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship;
- c. ELCA will make provision in its policies to eliminate the prohibition of rostered service by members who are in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships;
- d. ELCA will make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship;
- e. ELCA churchwide units will develop guidelines for a process by which congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization could hold people publicly accountable in their relationships who are in or contemplate being in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and who seek to be on rosters of this church;
- f. ELCA will develop amendments to "Definition and Guidelines for Discipline" and appropriate amendments to the "Vision and Expectations" document and the Candidacy Manual to accomplish the intent of this resolution;
- g. Additional policies will be developed so that those whom this church holds responsible for making decisions about fitness for rostered ministry in general and for call to a particular specific ELCA ministry may discern, and have guidance in discerning, the fitness for ministry of a member living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship;
- h. ELCA will trust its established processes and those to whom it has given the responsibility to discern who should and should not be rostered or called to public ministry in this church.