



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality

Approved at 2011 ELCIC National Convention, July 15, 2011

INTRODUCTION

This proposed *Social Statement on Human Sexuality* has been prepared according to the vision and process articulated in *The Public Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: A Policy on How the Church Addresses Social Issues*.¹

This social statement has three sections:

First, “Encountering the World in Which We Live” names some of the current issues of sexuality that face our world. These realities are named without judgement;

Second, “Facing God and Being Church” seeks to find common language to articulate the faith and theology which guides our life together; and

Third, “Doing Ministry” seeks to stimulate conversation about mission and ministry at the local and global level.

¹ www.elcic.ca/Public-Policy/documents/1991-ThePublicWitnessoftheEvangelicalLutheranChurchinCanada.pdf



Encountering the World in Which We Live

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.²

GOD'S WORLD

We live in God's world. We live in a good world. We live in a broken and hurting world. We live in a world made holy by the work of Jesus Christ.

SEXUALITY IN THE WORLD

We live in a world where sexuality is an important aspect of life. Human sexuality is a complex, mysterious, wonderful, tempting, vital and holy dimension of personal and societal existence. Sexuality is a significant and personal aspect of identity, affecting our capacity to love and be loved. Through sexual reproduction the species of this world fulfill God's command to be fruitful and multiply.³ Sexuality includes the quest for, and the sharing of, companionship. Through sexuality we experience pleasure and intimacy. Sexuality affects how we live and relate in family and in community. In local community and neighbourhood, developing an understanding of sexuality helps to develop healthy interpersonal relationships and to build healthy community. Sexuality is a significant dimension of art, culture, social and power dynamics.

OUR SEXUALIZED CULTURE

We live in a culture that seems obsessed with sex. Sexual imagery and themes abound in art, entertainment, scientific study, advertising, and pornography. With the rapid development of technology, there is an increase in abundance, access and technical sophistication of these images. As consumers of information, we have control over the sources we access.

We live in a world that portrays sexuality in all kinds of ways, both positive and negative, through an ever increasing variety of media and technology. Media and technology have an effect on how we communicate, how we think and how we interact as a society. With technology comes power to do good and evil. Media and technologies can be used to support relationships, to share news, to access information, to sell products and services, to influence opinion, to play, to learn, and to celebrate joyful occasions. However, some images tend to trivialize sexuality, and to portray, feed and cultivate the darker aspects of human nature.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

We live in a world where sexual activity occurs until the end of life. We live in a world where casual sexual encounters are becoming increasingly accepted. We live in a world that has developed various forms of birth control, offering significant power in determining when sexual activity might result in a pregnancy.

INDIVIDUALISM

We live in a society that places great emphasis on the individual and on individual freedom. This individualism affects our sexual behaviour as well as our perceptions of self, family, society and authority. At times, individuals may feel suspicious of putting trust in anyone or anything except themselves. Individual freedom and privilege offer people the opportunity to express themselves in a wide variety of ways. This emphasis on the individual is in contrast to some societies that place a stronger emphasis on communities and families.

FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

We live in a world where family is a fundamental building block of society, and is a core factor in the formation of personal identity. Family is defined and lived in various ways by various people. Families may consist of

² Psalm 24:1

³ Genesis 1:22, 28

couples (heterosexual or homosexual) with or without children, or an extended family including aunts, uncles, grandparents or cousins. Some families include members not related through blood such as by adoption. Because of death, divorce and remarriage families may include step-parents, step-grandparents and stepchildren. Families may consist of unrelated people living together such as unmarried couples or friends or people living in religious communities. These various types of families have all come about through the influence of cultures, contexts, family histories and personal experiences.⁴ Most people consider family to be extremely important to their life and well-being, and hope that family is a place of nurture, care, security and support.

In Canada, civil marriage is defined as “the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.”⁵ Marriage is commonly a primary factor in the formation of families. Some people form families without marriage and others choose to maintain committed relationships without marriage. We live in a society where many do not regard marriage as a prerequisite to sexual intimacy, nor a boundary confining it. Many couples who come to the church to be married are living together before the wedding. Elderly couples may live together common law because they are concerned that marriage would be detrimental to inheritances and/or pension income.

SINGLE PEOPLE

We live in a world where some people are single by choice and some by circumstance. Single people may feel excluded or judged, for example when a single person wants to adopt a child, or an individual feels pressure to find the “right person.” Single people can become invisible in the midst of the emphasis placed on the “traditional” family by church and community. Many people in our society live in households of one, which is another kind of family.

ORIENTATION

We live in a world aware of orientations other than heterosexual. Simple categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” do not describe the lived experience of some people. People use a variety of words to describe their own identity and reality, including: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited, queer, intersex and questioning. These identity markers vary with time and place. In Canada, same-sex marriage is legally recognized by governments.⁶ While people experience varying levels of acceptance, those of other than heterosexual orientation live as a minority in a predominantly heterosexual culture. Along with instances of overt, hostile, and even violent discrimination, members of this minority may experience an ongoing disconnect between their personal orientation and the assumptions, language, actions and metaphors of the heterosexual culture.

EQUALITY

We live in a world that is increasingly aware of diversity in gender, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation and socio-economic privilege.

We live in a society that values equality and human rights. These rights have been articulated through documents such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms declares that “Every individual is equal before and under the law, and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”⁷ At the same time, we live in a world where inequality and discrimination exist.

4 *LWF Tenth Assembly Study Book: For the Healing of the World*, Part III G. Justice and Healing in Families, Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003, page 192.

5 Bill C-38: *The Civil Marriage Act*, www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Docid=2333928&file=4

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Section 15 “Equality before and under the law and equal protection and benefit of law” www.laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

We live in a world where sexuality, power and authority are dimensions of human interaction. Sexual exploitation happens when power and authority are misused or abused. Sexual exploitation includes sexual abuse, human trafficking, sexual harassment, prostitution, pornography, incest, pedophilia and rape.⁸ When sexuality and the human body are turned into a commodity to be bought and sold, greed becomes a motivation for exploitation. Sexual exploitation is ignored or rationalized in many circles.

We live in a world with social and economic inequalities, where some have fewer resources and opportunities than others, making these people more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, the reality is that sexual exploitation occurs in all kinds of contexts.

SEX AND DISEASE

We live in a world where sexual behaviour can transmit disease. We are increasingly aware of the extent of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). STIs, including HIV-AIDS, have a huge effect on individuals, families, societies and nations. Socio-economic inequality and moral judgement can hamper the process of addressing health issues. Where people lack information, voice, resources and authority, it is difficult to prevent and treat disease and to promote health.

OUR CHURCH'S RESPONSE

We live in a church that is conflicted on how to respond to the reality of our current world. The personal and emotionally charged nature of sexuality means that it can be difficult to create safe, respectful space for conversation, reflection and discernment. Within our church there are differing views on how to read and interpret the Bible. When issues emerge and situations become conflicted and tense, people may take criticism personally, argue, or avoid conversation with those holding differing opinions.

We are a church that seeks to engage our current context, and yearns to see more clearly how God is active in our times.

⁸ For a definition of “Human Trafficking,” see *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Crime, United Nations, 2000. Part I, Article 3(a), page 42.* www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf. For definitions of “Sexual Abuse” and “Sexual Harassment”, see *ELCIC Sexual Abuse or Harassment Policy, 2006*, www.elcic.ca

Facing God and Being Church

We love because [God] first loved us.⁹

SELF-GIVING LOVE

God's fundamental orientation to the world is self-giving love. We are created in the image of God,¹⁰ and are redeemed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's love gives the world and its people value and worth. When we have the opportunity to serve a neighbour in need, we are serving Christ, and are treating such persons as equal in value because of Christ.¹¹ It is out of God's love for the world that the church seeks to understand sexuality within our current context.

WORD AND SACRAMENT—GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

"God calls us, through Word and Sacrament, to be disciples and to make disciples. Our discipleship is defined by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth."¹² In seeking to understand life's complexity, the church's gathering around Word and Sacrament¹³ reveals to us God's direction and supports us with a praying community. Through Word and Sacrament we work together to be a church faithful to Christ. Word and Sacrament tell the story of Christ and make real the presence of Christ. Through the gospel, God brings disciples into the church and nourishes them there. As the church lives out its mission as the living body of Christ, the church is a sign of God's presence in the world.

WORD AND SACRAMENT—SAINT AND SINNER

Through Word and Sacrament, disciples recognize that they are simultaneously justified and sinful.¹⁴ That is, through faith in Christ, we become aware of the paradox that we are always both saint and sinner. Being saints is a gift. We are made saints by God's forgiveness and justification, which comes to us by grace through faith. Being sinners is a reality and is not an excuse for bad behaviour; it is a call to repentance, and to lifelong learning in how to live as disciples. Being sinners keeps us humble. Being saints gives us hope, life, identity and purpose. This saint/sinner reality is at work in all aspects of life, including our sexuality.

LAW AND GOSPEL

God's Word comes to us as law and gospel. Law describes God's expectations. Gospel declares that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation¹⁵ are free gifts from God through Jesus Christ. Matters of sexuality and morality are not salvation issues. Law makes us aware of our sin, brokenness or hurt; aware of how a current moment stands in contrast to the will of God. Law also makes us aware of our need for God's forgiveness and God's help, and drives us to Christ. Gospel declares God's loving relationship with us in Christ to be the centre of existence. It assures us that God's salvation is pure gift and that God's love is constant. Faith in Christ informs every dimension of our existence as persons and as communities, including our sexuality.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF LOVE

Jesus summarized God's law in this way: to love God and to love neighbour.¹⁶ It is not always easy to decide how best to love our neighbour. In our decision-making and consideration of which actions will be most loving and beneficial, the context and life-situation of our neighbour is important.

9 1 John 4:19

10 Genesis 1:26–31

11 Matthew 25:40

12 ELCIC's *In Mission for Others: A Theology of Mission*, Adopted in Convention, June 2007; Originally adopted at the 1997 convention as the *Evangelical Declaration*. www.elcic.ca

13 In the Lutheran Tradition, Word and Sacrament are understood to be proclaiming the gospel through preaching and teaching that are rooted in the Bible, and through celebrating the sacraments which are Baptism and Communion.

14 Romans 3 & 4

15 Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 1166.

16 Matthew 22:34–39, Mark 12:28–34, Luke 10:25–28

Old Testament laws were given for the good of the Israelites. Since then, many of them have been set aside (for example, the purity laws) because they no longer applied to the contemporary context. Which laws are no longer applicable today and which ones are still applicable? When there is contention within the church regarding these issues, we are called, as St. Paul called the early church, to allow for differences and diversity for the sake of our unity in Christ and the advancement of Christ's mission. For example, working through the issue of circumcision led the church to release Gentiles from the expectation of circumcision, and led the disciples to focus ministry efforts in different contexts.¹⁷ There are times when diversity itself is a gift to the church and an expression of the power of the gospel to gather God's people.

“Agape” is a love that is active, committed, constant, self-giving and caring. It is more than a sense of comfort or good feeling. It is love that gives to another without expecting anything in return. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”¹⁸

INTEGRITY OF LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

We are able to love others because God first loved us.¹⁹ Our whole life is lived in relationship with God and relationship with neighbour. “In the expression of human sexuality, it is the integrity of our relationships which determines the meaning of our actions. We do not merely have sexual relations; we demonstrate our true humanity in personal relationship, the most intimate of which are sexual.”²⁰

A FAITHFUL LIFE

As individuals and as faith communities, we have a call to live a God-pleasing life, a life of faith active in love.

Demonstrating respect and self-control in matters of sexuality enhances the integrity of the message shared in witness and service. Our church teaches responsibility in sexual expression. The commandment “You shall not commit adultery” means “We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word, and deed, and each of us loves and honours his or her spouse.”²¹ The apostle Paul describes our bodies as “a temple of the Holy Spirit within you”²² and calls on Christians to take seriously the effects of our choices on our relationship with God, others and self.

Informed by the law and empowered by the gospel, we are inspired to go beyond just keeping the law. For example, the Small Catechism teaches us that “We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbours, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs,”²³ and “so that we do not tell lies about our neighbours, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defence, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”²⁴ The focus is on God's will for the whole world, God's ongoing concern for the well-being of our neighbours, and on our call to live faithfully in service to God's will.

FAMILY

“Sex, marriage and family are gifts of God in which to rejoice. Their essential goodness cannot be obscured by any crisis of our time.”²⁵ Ideally, families are places of love, care, support and the nurturing of faith. All

17 See Galatians 2:1–21

18 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

19 1 John 4:19

20 *A Statement on Sex, Marriage and Family*, adopted by the Fifth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 25–July 2, 1970. This social statement is a document recognized by the ELCIC. www.elcic.ca

21 Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, quoted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, page 1161.

22 1 Corinthians 6:19

23 Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, quoted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, page 1160.

24 *Ibid.* page 1161.

25 *A Statement on Sex, Marriage and Family*, 1970

families have times where forgiveness, repentance, healing and transformation are needed. “Families reflect all the ambiguities of what it means for human beings to be created in the image of God as good, but also to fall into sin. The heights and depths of the human condition are manifest in family life.”²⁶ Families reflect the saint/sinner reality of our existence.

One of God’s purposes for our families is to be a blessing to others. God makes a covenant with Abraham and Sarah that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”²⁷ Moses and his family lead God’s people to freedom. When Pharaoh threatens the life of the infant Moses, his mother and sister work to keep him alive. God uses the maternal instincts of Pharaoh’s own daughter to preserve Moses’ life. When Moses is reluctant to take on this leadership, his brother and sister are there to support him in doing God’s mission.²⁸ Similarly, Jesus’ family acts to preserve his life when he is an infant. Jesus’ mother is his first and longest serving disciple; her service begins before he is born, and she weeps at the foot of the cross.

Jesus says, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”²⁹ Informed by faith we should ever seek to show love for all families as well as the whole human family in all our words, actions and choices.

MARRIAGE

This church affirms marriage as a covenant of fidelity—a public, lifelong commitment between two people in a personal and sexual union. God, the source of all love, is active in marriage, offering encouragement, forgiveness, healing and blessing. The two spouses bear the primary responsibility for living out their vows and in recognizing God’s activity in their relationship. The church’s supportive role is expressed through community, prayer, worship and pastoral care.

Through the course of the Bible, the understanding of marriage changed as the people of God sought to faithfully follow the word of God given to the prophets of their age, and the new word given by Christ to the apostles.³⁰ Similarly, the understanding of marriage has changed through the course of history, and as various expressions of church sought to engage local societies. While honouring marriage theologically and liturgically, the Lutheran tradition has long acknowledged that civil authorities have a significant role to play in the administration of marriage.³¹ The Lutheran tradition also acknowledges there may be diversity in practice for “ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word”³²

In a spirit of prayer and learning, Christians continue to have their perspectives on family and marriage challenged by Word and Sacrament. This includes God calling us and prodding us toward a faithful life in all

26 *LWF Tenth Assembly Study Book: For the Healing of the World*, Part III G. Justice and Healing in Families, Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003, page 191.

27 Genesis 12:3

28 Exodus 4:14; 15:20

29 Mark 3:35

30 For example, there was a movement away from polygamy toward monogamy; away from a family contract toward a couple contract; away from a wife being a man’s possession (given to him by her father) toward a partnership of mutuality and equality (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:3–4, 14).

31 For example, in *A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*, Martin Luther writes: “So many lands, so many customs,” says the common proverb. For this reason, because weddings and the married estate are worldly affairs, it behooves those of us who are “spirituals”[i.e. *Geistliche*, a common term for clergy and monks] or ministers of the church in no way to order or direct anything regarding marriage, but instead to allow every city and land to continue their own customs that are now in use ... However, when people request of us to bless them in front of the church or in the church, to pray over them, or even to marry them, we are obligated to do this ... Because up to now people have made such big display at the consecrations of monks and nuns... how much more should we honor this godly estate of marriage and bless it, pray for it, and adorn it in an even more glorious manner. For, although it is a worldly estate, nevertheless it has God’s Word on its side and is not a human invention or institution...” Quoted from *the Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (on CD-ROM), edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

32 *Formula of Concord, Epitome X*, Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. 2000. *The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis. Epitome X reads in part: 1. ...we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word, but have been established only for good order and decorum, are in and of themselves neither worship ordained by God nor a part of such worship. “In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines” (Matthew 15:9). 2. We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God. 3. Of course, all frivolity and offense must be avoided, and special consideration must be given particularly to those who are weak in faith.

circumstances. Traditionally, marriage has meant a commitment of one man and one woman. The church now faces the reality that same-sex couples can be legally married in Canada and in some other countries.³³ Marriage provides community support, including legal protections for spouses and children; this support and protection are a need for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

Our church is conflicted on how to acknowledge covenants of fidelity made by same-sex couples. While acknowledging same-sex couples is troubling to some members of this church, failure to acknowledge these covenants of fidelity is troubling to others. At this moment in time, this church is being called in the spirit of St. Paul (Galatians 2) to respect and to allow space for varied understanding and practices.

We pray for the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to support couples who enter into a lifelong commitment of fidelity to one another in marriage.

SINGLE PEOPLE

One of God's purposes for single people is to be a blessing to others. "There should be no exaltation of either the single or the married state, one over the other."³⁴ This church affirms the value of celibacy as a legitimate and worthy calling for those who choose it.

DIVERSITY AND PRECONCEIVED BELIEFS

Peter hears a call to step past his preconceived notions. He would have found it unclean and unthinkable to share a meal with a person like Cornelius, a Gentile soldier. However, in prayer, Peter is called to engage the diversity on his doorstep. "The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'"³⁵ Moments later, messengers from Cornelius knock on Peter's door inviting Peter to meet with Cornelius. Now, he finds himself discussing the gospel with someone very different from himself.

Jesus uses the parable of the good Samaritan to remind us that, in order to carry out God's mission, God might use the people we despise or avoid. In compassion and action, the Samaritan encounters another who is very different from himself. "But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'"³⁶ The Samaritan demonstrates love for neighbour and foreigner; he does so with personal presence and radical generosity. In his ministry, Jesus forms relationships with a variety of people, including those whom society or religious leaders choose to marginalize. He eats with tax collectors and sinners, touches lepers, blesses children, and welcomes the women who anoint his feet and head.

We all have biases and prejudices. When we use our biases to try to articulate God's will, we run the risk of abusing power and authority. As in every age, we in our time need to examine our biases and prejudices. In so doing, we are open to growth in understanding of Holy Scriptures, and in the application of God's will for our time. "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger."³⁷

33 Canada is not the only country where Lutherans face this reality. For example, on 17 September 2009, the Church of Sweden wrote to its ecumenical partners to share, "Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriages." The paper summarizes several issues of church, state and weddings faced by Lutherans when the civil definition of marriage is changing, including a rationale for a shifted church definition of marriage on pages 13–14.

34 *A Statement on Sex, Marriage and Family*, 1970

35 Acts 10:15

36 Luke 10:33–35

37 James 1:19

JUSTICE, MERCY AND HEALING

We are called to speak and act for justice and mercy, and against injustice and abuse. The church has deep concern for thoughts, words and deeds that diminish the God-given dignity of any person, group or community. We are called to emulate Jesus' solidarity with the broken and hurting of the world. "[God] 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?"³⁸ We are also called to examine our own actions that are perceived as oppressive, discriminatory or harmful.

GRACE AND MERCY

"[God] is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."³⁹ When we are not gracious and not merciful, when we are quick to anger, when our love is scarce and intermittent, we are out of step with God and we need to repent.

RESPECT

We are called to deliver our messages and ministry with respect. "Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."⁴⁰ This does not mean we speak without passion or commitment. It does mean that our words and actions focus less on arguing, and more on opportunities for new awareness, repentance, healing and God's vision of hope.

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM AND TEMPTATIONS

"All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything."⁴¹ Christian freedom is described by Martin Luther as a paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all."⁴² In our current context, we may experience significant freedom; both the freedom of Christ and the freedom of privilege. We are also aware that not everyone enjoys that same degree of freedom or privilege. The question is: What will we do with our freedom?

As followers of Jesus, individual freedom implies responsibility, especially the responsibility to live out our calling as the priesthood of all believers,⁴³ and to fulfill our ministry of witness and service to the church and to the world. We recognize that with freedom comes power, and the temptation to abuse power. Our Christian faith provides guidance on how to balance freedom and power in sexual relationships. This always involves each serving the other as equals.

INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

There are differences among us regarding the interpretation of scripture, including those parts pertaining to sexuality. No matter where we may be on the spectrum of interpretation, the Holy Spirit is always trying to open our hearts to those who disagree with us and to help us learn the value of other ways of seeing and interpreting. God is calling us to trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance and to continue honest discussion, careful listening, discernment, reflection and open dialogue.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The unity of the church is a gift from God. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male

38 Micah 6:8

39 Joel 2:13

40 Ephesians 4:15

41 1 Corinthians 6:12

42 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, quoted from Timothy F. Lull, editor, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1989, page 596

43 1 Peter 2:9-10

and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁴ Being united in Christ does not mean homogeneity. In 1 Corinthians 12, the image of the church is one of wide diversity, united by the confession of the shortest creed “Jesus is Lord.”

When we feel tension around matters of morality, sexuality and interpretation of scripture, and hear threats to divide, Word and Sacrament remind us to turn to God, the true source and provider of our unity. The body of Christ is an image of unity.⁴⁵ This grand image of the church expresses connectedness, accountability, unity-with-diversity, and a way of being and doing church that is a living sign of the presence of Christ. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.”⁴⁶ The depth and implications of this reality are truly astounding. God continues to transform people throughout their lives and calls us to mutual support in the midst of change and challenge.

A slogan of the Reformation was “the church must always be reforming.”⁴⁷ In our own church in recent years, examples of changes that have occurred include remarrying the divorced, the ordination of women, and communion of the baptized. In seeking to change, or not, it is essential to consider what helps us to proclaim faithfully the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ Since God unites us in Christ, we are one even when we cannot agree on every detail as we seek to follow Jesus in our ever-changing world.

CHOOSING UNITY

Choosing unity over division is no small task; especially if we feel that God has given us our conviction by speaking to us through Word and Sacrament, and that the witness and service of the church are at stake. Choosing to be connected with those who think differently than we do challenges us in a very different way than being among those who think as we do. As we seek to share the gospel with a diverse world, having a diverse church is a God-given advantage. “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”⁴⁹ The reality is that church division does occur, and at certain times helps individuals to preserve a sense of integrity. Christ invites us to recognize the faith in other believers, even as we experience the tension and challenges of life’s issues and church structures. We are to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”⁵⁰

44 Galatians 3:27–28

45 1 Corinthians 12:14–31

46 1 Corinthians 12:26

47 *Ecclesia semper reformanda est.*

48 “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.” The Augsburg Confession, Article VII
Quoted from Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. 2000. *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

49 Galatians 5:13–15

50 Ephesians 4:3

Doing Ministry

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.⁵¹*

SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“The mission of this church, as an expression of the universal Church and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people in Canada and around the world through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments and through service in Christ’s name.”⁵² In Word, sacrament, witness and service, this church seeks the kingdom of God.

BE DISCIPLES AND MAKE DISCIPLES

This church is called to be disciples and make disciples. In the Gospels, Jesus’ ministry is to the whole person: body, mind, heart, spirit; and his ministry is to the whole community: individual, small group, synagogue, crowd and society.

Our interest in our current context is based on Christ’s interest in the well-being of all. To be disciples and make disciples, we need to hear the Word and receive the sacraments, through which God proclaims love, calls us to repentance, gives us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, guides us toward the reign of God, and sends us into mission for others. “We believe, teach and confess that the Holy Spirit calls and gathers the whole church into the mission of God, which takes seriously both the reality of the world, and the reality of Christ, with equal care.”⁵³

CELEBRATE SEXUALITY

This church celebrates the truth that sexuality is part of God’s good creation. We relate to one another and to God as sexual beings. We will lift up positive images of healthy sexuality that nurture relationship and person. We articulate and lift up our vision of lives as sexual creatures longing for companionship and capable of deep levels of intimacy, love and care.

UPHOLD DIGNITY

This church upholds the dignity of all people. We recognize the image of Christ in every person and serve that person as Christ himself. In meeting diverse people, we begin with a core sense of respect for the value of each person as a unique child of God.

HUMILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

This church takes a humble attitude toward others. This church is called to confession and repentance, and to leave the judgement of other people’s salvation to God. Luther asserts that our baptism calls us to daily devotional practice, including repentance, transformation, and rising as a new person before God.⁵⁴ Jesus’ words are, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”⁵⁵ While matters of sexuality and morality are not salvation issues, humility communicates respect for others, and

51 Luke 4:18–19; Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61:1

52 *ELCIC Constitution*, Article IV, Section 1. www.elcic.ca

53 *ELCIC’s In Mission for Others: A Theology of Mission*. www.elcic.ca

54 Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, quoted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 1165.

55 Matthew 7:1–4

is patient in hearing and learning the stories of others, even as we continue to wrestle with challenging ethical issues related to matters of sexuality.

CREATE SAFE SPACES

This church welcomes all and seeks to create safe, respectful space for conversation, reflection, teaching and discernment on matters of sexuality. This church trusts that such discernment will lead to opportunities for mission—both locally and globally.

CREATE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

This church commits itself to engaging the diverse faces of the world in which we live. This church recognizes that meeting diverse peoples and forming a truly inclusive community is a journey of discovery that will include moments of discomfort and anxiety. This church celebrates the vital role that congregations play in helping diverse people of faith to meet and to form community.

SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS

This church recognizes that, like Jesus, congregations engage in ministries to the whole person: body, heart, mind and soul; and to the whole community: individual, small group, church, crowd and society. Congregations will help individuals to develop a stewardship of life that seeks justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with God.⁵⁶

This church recognizes that individuals hold much freedom and responsibility in making faithful decisions in matters of sexuality. We will support individuals by providing opportunities to develop healthy relationships that offer friendship and support through a faith community.

SUPPORT FAMILIES

This church encourages congregations to generate opportunities for learning in order to remind us that our purpose is to be a blessing to others. In faith, families can be witnesses of Christ's love to each other, and to the wider community.

This church seeks to assist children and youth in developing healthy attitudes and behaviours regarding sexual expression.

This church recognizes that given the diversity of contexts in which congregations do ministry, congregations will be led by the Holy Spirit to find vital, creative and unexpected ways to do ministry. This church calls on congregations to support people in their various living circumstances, marital status and households. This includes attention to the use of language, the structure of programming and the issuing of invitations.

SUPPORT MARRIAGE

This church affirms the value of marriage as a God-given gift, and will support married couples as they live out their lifelong commitment to each other in the face of all the pressures this world brings. We also recognize that, for a variety of reasons, some couples do not choose marriage, or choose to delay marriage. We seek to support couples and families in the process of growing in faith and discipleship. We will teach that healthy relationships are built on a foundation of trust, respect, and commitment, loving the other as Christ has loved us.

SUPPORT SINGLE PEOPLE

This church affirms the value of being single and recognizes that, for a variety of reasons, some individuals are not called to marriage. "We acknowledge the special needs of single persons, whether widowed, divorced, never married, or conscientiously celibate, and endeavour to support them in the community of faith."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Micah 6:8

⁵⁷ *Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality in the Alberta Context*, 2009. www.albertasynod.ca/FCKeditor2FC1/UserFiles/File/Bishops%20Letters/Marriage--Task%20Force.pdf

RECOGNIZE ORIENTATION

Our church recognizes that it is affected by the biases of our predominantly heterosexual culture, and by our society's call for more openness.

This church encourages congregations and synods to engage in practices that more fully enable all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to live as members of the body of Christ and as co-workers in ministry, and to help nurture disciples in the "image of God."⁵⁸

OPPOSE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This church is called to oppose sexual exploitation in all its manifestations. This includes addressing social and economic injustices that leave people more vulnerable to exploitation. This church will be critical of messages, images, policies and practices that diminish the dignity of individuals or groups. This church will journey with, learn from, and advocate for those who have been exploited.

This church will speak out against people choosing to engage in exploitive behaviour. We seek to learn effective ways to support those who are sincerely trying to repent of oppressive behaviour.

This church opposes all practices that turn the human body into a commodity to be bought and sold. The sexual body is never to be used as an object for commercial purposes.⁵⁹ We are committed to advocating for laws and policies that seek to prevent sexual exploitation in all its manifestations.

ACT FOR JUSTICE

This church will act for justice when we learn that people are being treated unfairly. It is our Christian duty to break the silence when power and authority are misused and abused, and to work to end sexual exploitation in all its forms, including sexual abuse, human trafficking, sexual harassment, prostitution, pornography, incest, pedophilia, sexual assault and rape.⁶⁰

We will journey in solidarity with those who are experiencing hurt, brokenness or exploitation. We will deepen our awareness of the root causes of sexual injustice and exploitation. We will advocate for policies, practices and resources that uphold dignity and address particular issues surrounding sexuality. In being a voice for the voiceless, the language of human rights helps the church speak to civil authorities and proclaim God's desire for the dignity of all persons. Acting for justice is most effective when based on authentic relationship.

We commit to examine and reform our own actions that are perceived as oppressive, discriminatory or harmful.

PROMOTE HEALTH

This church will work with other people to promote sexual health through education, resources, empowerment and care. We are committed to deepening our understanding and response to the reality of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV-AIDS.

STEWARDSHIP OF MEDIA

This church seeks to learn about the effects of evolving media and technology on the world, psychologically, socially and spiritually, especially as it relates to human sexuality. This church accepts the challenge of sharing

58 Genesis 1:26

59 Wording based on ELCA *A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality.aspx

60 For a definition of "Human Trafficking," see Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Crime*, United Nations, 2000. Part I, Article 3(a), page 42. www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf. For definitions of "Sexual Abuse" and "Sexual Harassment," see *ELCIC Sexual Abuse or Harassment Policy*, 2006. www.elcic.ca

the gospel in this swiftly changing technological age. This church is critical of communication that dishonours the dignity of persons or distorts God's gift of sexuality. This church will use media and technology to praise God and to further lift up the gift of sexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND WELCOME DIVERSITY

This church acknowledges diversity of opinion on how to respond to the way that sexuality is expressed, used and abused in our society and our world. Working from a rich and faithful practice of Word and Sacrament, members of this church have come to very different opinions on these matters. At the same time, members of this church have a variety of opportunities for ministry on their doorsteps. The local church is a wonderful place for the gathering of people from various ages, backgrounds and circumstances, who can learn from one another as they welcome each other and participate together in Christ's body, Christ's gospel and Christ's sacraments.

This church is called to denounce discrimination, including sexual discrimination, in all its forms.

RESPOND *In Mission for Others*

This church calls congregations and synods to play a vital role in demonstrating care for persons and in doing ministry. Jesus promises that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."⁶¹ Through worship, pastoral care, service, and prayer, this church invites people to place all circumstances in God's hands. Through teaching and learning, congregations and synods help people to understand faith, to nurture positive values about sexuality and to grow as disciples.

LISTEN AND PRAY

This church recognizes that in our life together, we listen, and continue to pray "Your will be done on earth as in heaven."⁶² We pray for wisdom.

OUR HOPE

This church lives by faith and grace rather than by fear. Living faithfully means trusting in God's grace boldly, and taking risks. This church is yearning to see how God will be active in our future, and how God will use us as agents of reconciliation in our broken world.⁶³

61 Matthew 18:20

62 Matthew 6:10, the Lord's Prayer

63 2 Corinthians 5:16–21