

# SUMMARY OF THE 2009 ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENT AND RESOLUTIONS

## What are social statements and how do they come into existence?

Social statements are developed through a participatory process over a 5-6 year period and are an important means by which the ELCA addresses social concerns and carries out its active participation in society. Previous statements have addressed the environment, economics, and health care. **In particular, this current social statement involved a broad and reflective process of study, discussion, prayer, and dialog engaging the entire church beginning in 2002.** It involved three studies and over 30,000 responses to those studies. In 2008, 111 synodical hearings took place. Forty-two synods adopted memorials to the churchwide assembly, some calling for its adoption (37) while others called for its rejection (5).

## Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust"

The Churchwide Assembly adopted "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," the ELCA's 10th social statement, with editorial amendments. The social statement is a theological and teaching document that builds on the key Lutheran principles of justification by grace and Christian freedom to serve the neighbor. It emphasizes that central to our vocation, in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships. It therefore affirms that we are called to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices in which trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive. The social statement addresses, among other topics, marriage, same-gender relationships, families, protecting children, friendships, commitment, social responsibility and moral discernment. **Regarding same-gender committed relationships, the social statement recognizes that members of this church are not in agreement and identifies the different perspectives that are present among us.**

## What is in the statement?

The social statement draws upon classic Lutheran themes to address the complex issues of sexuality. These include justification by grace through faith, trust, vocation, the Ten Commandments, and the freedom of the Christian for service to the neighbor. It addresses a broad scope of issues, including marriage, family, children, divorce, sexuality outside marriage, and friendship. It also speaks about social issues, including sexual abuse, global sex-trade exploitation, commodification of the body, professional misconduct, and social structures that support relationships and enhance trust.

## What does the social statement say about homosexuality?

It states that the ELCA is opposed to all forms of violence or discrimination against homosexuals and is committed to welcoming all people, regardless of sexual orientation, and their families into our congregations.

On the matter of whether or how to regard lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, the social statement describes several broadly representative positions that members in this church hold. It acknowledges that these follow from strongly held different understandings of Scripture and tradition. **On the one hand, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and such behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. On the other hand, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationship that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are**

**lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage.**

**The statement recognizes that these differing understandings will continue to exist among ELCA members and it affirms the possibility of living together in continued discussion despite our disagreements.** We can do this by drawing deeply on the historical Lutheran tradition of respecting the other's conscience and seeking a caring response to the needs of the neighbor.

## **Ministry Policies Resolutions**

Voting members adopted resolutions proposed by the Church Council based on those contained in a "Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies." The assembly adopted the resolutions in the following order:

**Resolution 3:** "Resolved, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all." (Adopted by a vote of 771-230)

**Resolution 1:** "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships." (Adopted by a vote of 619-402)

**Resolution 2:** "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church." (Adopted by a vote of 559-451:

**Resolution 4:** **This resolution called upon members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree; declared the intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making about candidacy and the call process;** eliminated the prohibition of rostered service by members in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships; recognized and **committed to respect the conviction of members who believe that the ELCA should not call or roster people in committed same-gender relationships;** called for development of accountability guidelines; directed that appropriate amendments to ministry policy documents be drafted and approved by the Church Council; and **urged that this church continue to trust congregations, bishops, synods and others responsible for determining who should be called into public ministry.** (Adopted by a vote of 667-307)

## **Does this mean the ELCA has endorsed the blessing of same-gender unions?**

**No.** The assembly was not asked to consider and thus took no action concerning a churchwide rite of blessing. The assembly's action means that a congregation, however, is *permitted* to find ways to hold publicly accountable same-gender relationships that intend to be lifelong and monogamous and to surround these couples and their families with prayer and support in a variety of ways. **The action adopted does not require any congregation to do so.** The fourth resolution does require public accountability of anyone in such a relationship who seeks to be an ELCA pastor, deaconess, diaconal minister, or associate in ministry.