



# Pacifica Synod - ELCA

## Office of the Bishop - Lutheran Center For Mission & Learning

February 19, 2009

Dear Pastors and People of the Pacifica Synod,

God's grace and peace be with you.

The second draft of the ELCA Social Statement, now titled *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is being released and distributed February 18, 2009 to all rostered leaders, and will be available for all congregations and to the public on February 19. It is being accompanied by *The Report and Recommendations for Ministry Policies* from the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Sexuality. I hope you all have an opportunity to download and receive these documents. The members of the task force and many others have worked many, many long hours, days, and years to bring these documents to the church. Those who worked on this since the 2001 Churchwide Assembly resolution that called for this study and social statement have written several study documents, read thousands of responses, crafted drafts of documents for preview and comment, and now have given their work and their opinion to the whole church to make some very important decisions in 2009.

Here is the sequence that now follows. The documents are for our reading and review at this time. They will go before the ELCA Conference of Bishops in early March. The bishops may make recommendations, but not changes, to the documents. If there are recommendations from the Conference of Bishops, they will go with the documents to the ELCA Church Council as it meets the last week of March. Between now and that ELCA Church Council meeting, Synod Councils may send resolutions to the ELCA Church Council for consideration at their March meeting. So far, one congregation of the Pacifica Synod has requested that our Synod Council send a resolution to the ELCA Church Council regarding the voting percentages at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. At the end of March, the ELCA Church Council will offer the final wording for the *Social Statement* and the *Recommendations for Ministry Policies*. The ELCA Church Council has the responsibility to accept, or amend, or edit, or reject the language of both of those two documents. On April 2, 2009, the final proposed versions of these two documents will be ready and released to the whole church. Please note, that between now and the end of March, the language and content of these two documents may indeed change again. Of course, it is also possible that the ELCA Church Council will send the documents on as they are now presented.

After April 2, the documents will go to the 65 synods and possibly be addressed at the synod assemblies, if they so choose. Synod Assemblies may memorialize the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, scheduled to meet in August 2009 in Minneapolis. Through memorials, Synod Assemblies may recommendation amendments to both documents. The Pacifica Synod Assembly is May 21-23, 2009 at the Riverside Convention Center.

I hope you will read the documents in their entirety. A wide spectrum of concerns regarding human sexuality are addressed. A thorough treatise on how ELCA Lutherans tackle difficult ethical issues is offered. It is the work of knowledgeable lay members, congregation pastors, teaching theologians, and others who sat together many hours, in all their diversity, and came together with the thoughts expressed in the two documents and the report. There are, as we expected, areas where we will almost all agree, and other parts of the documents that will continue to be controversial in the ELCA and in this synod. As you have or will read in the documents, the Task Force recognizes what we all know to be so very true in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America today, that "this church is not of one mind" about certain aspects of human sexuality, in particular, about the way we as a church will view homosexuality. There continues to be great diversity in thought and belief about this in society, in our local communities, in families, and in the church and other religious communities, both near and globally, too. The

language of the documents before us now recognizes this wide range of thought, belief, and biblical understanding within the church of which we are a part. Rather than only one way to address this diversity, the documents suggest a range of possibilities and make room for the bound conscience of all members and leaders of the church.

Another message will be sent to you in the next 24 hours reminding you of the March 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Theological Reflection and Dialogue with The Rev. Dr. (Professor) Terrance Fretheim, who sat on the Task Force for the Study of Sexuality for several years. We will also remind you of the two Hein-Fry lectures on Biblical Authority that are being held this spring in California. I will also offer several times and places between now and the Conference of Bishops where I will be available to meet with rostered leader and the laity of the church to discuss any and all aspects of these two draft documents.

Let us remain in prayer for one another as we read these documents through different lenses and biblical understanding. Let us pray for those who will continue to make important decisions and recommendations in the days ahead, namely the 65 Synod Councils, the ELCA Conference of Bishops, the ELCA Church Council, the Pacifica Synod Assembly voting members, and finally the voting members of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Please join with me in continuing to pray for the unity of the church in the midst of its challenges.

Saint Paul urged us with these words, *“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.”*

In the Light of Christ,

The Rev. Murray D. Finck

Bishop

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