

# **LCGS Conversations on Human Sexuality: A Snapshot**

**06/15/2010**

## **Introduction**

The goal of this document is to serve as a recap of the human sexuality conversations (held at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Duluth). It is an assessment of where our congregation currently stands on this issue. The recap should be thought of as a snapshot of the process we underwent over the last nine months.

We suggest pausing for reflection before proceeding. Issues of human sexuality are highly sensitive in nature. We ask God to provide us with the clarity of careful introspection and open mindedness to discern His will:

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

As we become “fully convinced” we ask that God grant us understanding and respect of the diverse faith-centered viewpoints of human sexuality and that we may grow in compassion for our neighbors’ beliefs.

## **Background**

The Eleventh Biennial Churchwide Assembly was held Aug. 17-23, 2009. During the assembly the ELCA’s 10<sup>th</sup> social statement was adopted including four resolutions regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships (see Appendix A for a description of the resolutions and vote tallies). These resolutions have proven to be controversial and a wide ranging spectrum of reactions has been observed.

## **Process for the Conversations on Human Sexuality**

The Vision Council, under the leadership of Bob Poulter (then serving as Congregation President) and Pastor Dave, sought to create a safe place for conversation and understanding. To facilitate this goal, a covenant (see Appendix B) emphasizing mutual respect from all participants was created and explained. A total of seven meetings took place between October 21<sup>st</sup> and January 20<sup>th</sup>.

The first meeting was held in the gathering space with 61 in attendance. Much of this meeting was devoted to personal statements. Each speaker was asked to describe which of three positions they held: Position #1 - Homosexuality is a sin, and is a deep perversion of God's intended created order; Position #2 - Homosexuality is a sin, but the sin may be forgiven; Position #3 - Homosexual orientation is a gift from God, to be celebrated and expressed in a way that honors God. Passionate diversity was present in the viewpoints of those who spoke; all three positions

were represented and many chose to broaden the spectrum by considering themselves in-between positions. Others were undecided and expressed their gratitude towards those who shared their thought provoking beliefs. The meeting closed with many members expressing a strong desire to study the biblical texts incorporating homosexuality.

This aspiration set the agenda for the next six meetings. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> meetings (October 28<sup>th</sup> and November 11<sup>th</sup>) we were instructed in how to attempt to ascertain God's will based on four types of readings: historical, literary, theological, and devotional. The goal was to "let all be fully convinced in their own minds" and "pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding". Meetings four, five, and six, focused on the Romans 1 text (Romans 1:18-32) and the ensuing sharing and responding from that critical piece. Similar themes reverberate throughout the other passages (Corinthians 6: 9-11; Timothy 1: 8-11; Genesis 10: 1-11; Judges 19: 22-30; Leviticus 18: 22; Leviticus 20:13) such that the rest of the texts were covered in the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting (last meeting, January 20<sup>th</sup>). At the conclusion of the last meeting, participants referred to the Vision Council for further action.

## **Outcome**

The total number attending the meetings was estimated at 94; this number in no way fully summarizes all who discussed the issue nor does it justly represent the deep level of contemplation that many members engaged in while considering this subject. There remains to be a wide range of beliefs, some of which are represented below.

Some believe homosexuality is an unforgivable sin, and is a deep perversion of God's intended created order. Some believe that the Bible passages clearly describe homosexuality as unnatural and sinful and that the texts studied should not be interpreted to refer to homosexuality in a positive manner, thereby making God's will evident.

Some believe homosexuality is a sin and can be forgiven, followed by the practice of abstinence.

Some believe the Bible never addresses lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; the descriptions in the texts studied tend to demonstrate acts of power. Isolated bible passages can be used to justify social situations we no longer support (e.g. slavery, women's limited role in the church, etc.) and the command to "love thy neighbor" is a strong indication of God's will.

Some believe homosexual orientation is a gift from God, to be celebrated and expressed in a way that honors God; lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships should be upheld much in the same way as monogamous, heterosexual marriages.

Some were fully convinced at the conclusion of our meetings while others continue to reflect. Some believe diversity is not a sign of weakness it is a sign of strength within our congregation.

There have been mixed responses from the LCGS process. Some who shared their beliefs felt relief at being able to do so while others have felt isolated. Some have gained understanding of others' insight into their positions. Some have felt frustration and confusion about others' beliefs.

## **Unity in Christ; Diversity in Perspective**

Many are questioning what the results of this process mean for LCGS. What is our unity? We pray that understanding and respect can continue to act as unifying agents to keep us in the center of our faith, Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 2: 13-16

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

The ELCA resolutions are consistent with congregational sovereignty; it is left for us (the LCGS) to decide how to handle the resolutions and broader questions regarding same gender relationships. In general, members seem to agree to respect the individual, widely varied beliefs of our members regarding same gender relationships.

As a congregation reconciled in Christ, looking forward to a future of continued growth and spiritual uplifting, we must consider our Mission and Vision Statements as a strong foundation (see Appendix C). These statements evolved from a process that involved the beliefs of the congregation. The Mission Statement was accepted by the Church Council and by the congregation (at the annual meeting) in January 2003. The Vision Statement was accepted by the Church Council in February 2003. Members fully believing in our Mission and Vision Statements can be a united family with diverse views on human sexuality under these statements.

Romans 15: 5-7

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Let us find God's peace in the knowledge that we are indeed united as together we strive to become perfect in Christ. While diversity exists on social issues there is unity in Christ; this unity must transcend any worldly concerns to keep us centered as brothers and sisters in Christ and that is Christ himself.

## Appendix A: ELCA Resolutions

Four resolutions as summarized on the ELCA Website (<http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly/Actions/Voting.aspx#MP>):

**Resolution 1:** Adopted by a vote of 619-402: “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.”

**Resolution 2:** Adopted by a vote of 559-451: “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.”

**Resolution 3:** Adopted by a vote of 771-230 as amended: “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.”

**Resolution 4:** Adopted by a vote of 667-307 as amended: 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.

## **Appendix B: Covenant for LGCS Conversations on Human Sexuality**

### **Covenant**

Speaking out is a personal choice

Members are expected to respect each other's views

Tolerated the opinions and ideas of others

Try to stay to a 3 minute time limit or so

Give others a chance to speak before speaking again

Listen attentively

Keep personal thing spoken in our time together confidential

Respond as we are able to requests of the moderators

No applauding, no booing

Pray for our church

***Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.***

## **Appendix C: Mission and Vision Statements of LCGS Duluth**

**Mission:** We are a Community of Christ, Experiencing God, Reaching Out, Nurturing Faith.

**Vision:** We are an active community of Christ —

We experience God through meaningful worship, fellowship and study. Inspired by God's word, we form loving, prayerful relationships with one another.

We reach out with compassion and share the love of Christ. We actively care for our neighbors, locally and globally. We accept all people and open our hearts to the needs of others.

We nurture each person's faith by bringing God's word into their lives, trusting it to give new life, hope and meaning. We create faith-nurturing experiences for all ages in church, home and community.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, our lay and clergy leaders prepare each of us to follow God's call. Our unique gifts, interests and passions are celebrated and effectively and faithfully used in the mission of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd.