

**Report and Recommendations  
from the Task Force for  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality**

January 13, 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The members of this task force are joined by our love of Jesus Christ and our determination to hold fast to the authority of Scripture. We have been humbled by the assignment from the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to serve as stewards of the controversial task of offering recommendations to this church related to blessing committed same-sex relationships and ordaining, consecrating, or commissioning people in such committed relationships. We have undertaken this assignment in the conviction that gay, lesbian, and heterosexual Christians all belong to Christ's church through baptism. We also affirm the welcome of this church to gay and lesbian people as stated in the Churchwide Assembly resolutions of 1991, 1995, and 1999.

As a Christian community, the task force has been engaged in a remarkable and challenging journey of claiming one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, while differing passionately with one another on issues surrounding human sexuality. Task force members are unanimous in their belief that the task force has made a genuinely good-faith effort. We have sustained a dialogue marked by mutual respect for conscience and have reached our recommendations, as well as accepted the dissenting positions recorded below, in that same spirit and without rancor.

Our journey mirrors the journey of congregations and communities across the country. The task force's journey has been painful and difficult, but has brought us to a surprising new place. As God worked among us to build trust, we realized that we could disagree while affirming and respecting one another's opinions and faithfulness. Our hope and vision for the reception of these recommendations is that our experience of strengthened community despite differences can take place for the whole church.

We offer this report to the church with a deep awareness that it will affect our partners in ministry across the country and around the world. We invite the prayers, responses, and admonitions of all our partners. We ask this because we know that we can discern God's will for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America only in the fullness and accountability of the global community of Christ.

We give thanks to God for the members of this church who have supported us with prayer during this time of study and deliberation. That prayerful support has been a sign to us of the unity that we truly share, for it has been offered by people representing a variety of views and goals.

We pray that this unity will continue to grow without sacrificing the conscience-bound commitment of those who find themselves in opposition to one another. In honor of our work, and in faithfulness to the law and spirit revealed to us by Jesus Christ, we request that all members of the ELCA refrain from activities that contribute to divisiveness and commit themselves to persistent respectful listening and unceasing prayer as we continue this journey together.

It has been an honor to provide leadership for the remarkable group of people who are serving the church as members of this task force. Their commitment and integrity have transformed a nearly impossible assignment into a powerful experience of community that truly reflects God's power to transcend barriers through the love of Jesus Christ. We thank these members, whose names are listed below, for their faithful work, honesty, and courageous commitment to this difficult task.

*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. —Ephesians 2:13,14*

In Christ's peace,

**The Rev. Margaret G. Payne**

Bishop of the ELCA New England Synod  
Chair, Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality

**The Rev. Dr. James Childs**

Director, ELCA Studies on Sexuality

## **Members of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality**

The following persons are serving on this task force in a manner that is faithful to the gospel and the tasks set before them, while unwavering in the steadfast expression of their convictions.

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**Report and Recommendations**  
**from the Task Force for**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality**  
January 13, 2005

**Part One – Recommendations**

**Recommendation One**

Preface

*It has become clear to the task force that the disagreement over these issues before the church is deep, pervasive, multi-faceted, and multi-layered. This church is not of one mind. This being the case, we believe that this first recommendation should be put before this church as a precondition to the other recommendations.*

**Because the God-given mission and communion we share is at least as important as the issues about which faithful conscience-bound Lutherans find themselves so decisively at odds, the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality recommends that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements.**

Commentary

Members of the task force heard widespread comments that, despite differing views on sexuality, it is not helpful to engage in a vote that will produce ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ among faithful Christians. If the assembly approves this first recommendation, it is declaring that this issue does not have to be church dividing. The members of the task force recognize that, at this time, there is no consensus on these matters within the ELCA and that our differences express deeply held and conscience-bound positions. Approval of this recommendation will be an indication that this church is willing to embrace the commitment to continue mutually respectful dialogue on the issues of human sexuality while seeking to remain engaged in mission together as the ELCA.

**Recommendation Two**

Preface

*With respect to the matter of blessing same-sex couples who have entered into long-term monogamous covenants of love and care, the ELCA currently has no legislated policy, and the task force declines to recommend any change. In this time of conflict and uncertainty, the Conference of Bishops pointed the way by treating such decisions as matters of pastoral care and the task force believes that pastors and congregations can and should be trusted by this church to exercise the wisdom of discretion in their ministry to same-sex couples and their natural and congregational families. Therefore, we are agreed that the following recommendation is an appropriate expression of that trust.*

**The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality recommends that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the pastoral guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops.\***

Commentary

- a. We recognize that in this church the desire to provide the best pastoral care may motivate some pastors and congregations to surround same-sex couples in committed, long-term relationships with prayerful support. Surrounding people or households with prayerful support does not necessarily mean public approval of homosexual sexual intimacy.
- b. Such an exercise of pastoral care should be understood as a matter quite distinct from and in no way equivalent to marriage. Indeed, this church holds that “Marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman.”(*Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions*, 1996) The mandate of the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly did not envision the present secular debate over gay marriage and the task force mandate does not involve addressing those public concerns. The Lutheran tradition distinguishes between marriage as a civil matter, bound to the regulations and approval of society, and the blessing of such a union. Such a blessing does not remove sin from marriage, but prayerfully grounds marriage in God’s promise of life and forgiveness.
- c. We beseech the church to commit itself to respect one another’s consciences in this matter. This means 1) to show respect and sensitivity to those who believe such pastoral support is inherently wrong, and 2) to show respect and sensitivity to those who believe such support is an appropriate expression of pastoral care.

Many people have asked for a simple answer to the question: Does the Bible say that sexual activity between two people of the same sex is always a sin? This question is near the heart of the division of opinion in our church because Christians who are faithful to God’s Word give different answers. Among other responses that could be mentioned, some say the teaching of the Bible is clear and condemns such activities as sinful, while some say that the verses in the Bible usually cited do not apply to a love relationship between two consenting adults in a committed relationship. In this matter the ELCA needs to continue in prayerful study of Scripture with one another.

**Recommendation Three**

Preface

*The issue concerning the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of people in same-sex committed relationships is one that has caused the greatest division among members of the task force. We experienced within our group the painful tension caused when*

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\*Conference of Bishops, October 5-8, 1993, “Blessing of Homosexual Relationships” CB93.10.25: “We, as the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, recognize that there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church’s ministry. Nevertheless, we express trust in and will continue dialogue with those pastors and congregations who are in ministry with gay and lesbian persons, and affirm their desire to explore the best ways to provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister.”

*Christians, in good conscience, differ in their interpretations of Scripture with regard to this issue. In our discussions, the following strong convictions were voiced repeatedly as we struggled to formulate a recommendation that would find support among the majority of the task force members.*

- *Some of us believe that we should affirm and uphold the current policy and practice of the church, assuming that discipline will take place and be graciously endured.*
- *Some of us believe that we should review and modify Vision and Expectations and Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline, especially regarding homosexual people living in committed relationships.*
- *Some of us believe that the ELCA should find a way to “create a space” in our church (for example, by allowing local option, developing a process to grant exceptions to policy, ordination to place, non-geographic synod, etc.) for ministries that would fully accept the gifts of gay and lesbian rostered leaders without fear of discipline or rejection.*

*Despite this diversity of beliefs, the task force sought to shape a recommendation that would provide the most hope and possibility for the life and mission of the ELCA at this time. Two of the strongly dissenting positions are presented in more detail in Part Three of this report. Others on the task force hold positions that are not totally supportive of the recommendation, but see it as a way to provide the continuing stability of tradition while also creating opportunity for ongoing discernment of new ways in which the Spirit might be speaking to the church in our time.*

*Therefore, we present the following recommendation that was approved by a strong majority of task force members. It is important to note that this recommendation prevailed even though some task force members who supported it would have preferred other options.*

**The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality recommends that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue under the standards regarding sexual conduct for rostered leaders as set forth in *Vision and Expectations* and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, but that, as a pastoral response to the deep divisions among us, this church may choose to refrain from disciplining those who in good conscience, and for the sake of outreach, ministry, and the commitment to continuing dialogue, call or approve partnered gay or lesbian candidates whom they believe to be otherwise in compliance with *Vision and Expectations* and to refrain from disciplining those rostered people so approved and called.**

#### Commentary

- a. In the ELCA, congregations are not forced to accept any pastor or rostered lay person. In keeping with the established standards of this church for ordained ministry, a congregation should strive, after prayer and deliberation, to call a person whose gifts for ministry seem well suited to the needs of that particular community of faith.

- b. Such calling of a person should be done with respect for those whose consciences are bound to an interpretation of Scripture that accords with the present policy of this church. For example, those who feel conscience bound to call people in committed same-sex unions should refrain from making the call a media event either as an act of defiance or with the presumption of being prophetic.
- c. This approach allows the ELCA to trust congregations, synods, candidacy committees, and bishops to discern the Holy Spirit's gifts for ministry among the baptized and make judgments appropriate to each situation. This approach recognizes that there will be congregations, synods, candidacy committees, and bishops who will not consider partnered gay or lesbian candidates for rostered ministry.
- d. Since this recommendation speaks to the present situation, the task force expects that the ELCA will design a review process as part of our ongoing dialogue.

**Please turn now to Part Two for a further account of the rationale behind these recommendations.**



## Part Two - Rationale for Task Force Recommendations

The members of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality are thankful for the many thousands in this church who took part in this study (*Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality*) and shared with us their heartfelt convictions and concerns. We listened to the voices of this church as we, also, studied the Word and sought the guidance of the Spirit. (*For a general overview of the task force's work, please see Part Four.*)

**We listened** carefully, respectfully, and compassionately to the voices of this church regarding the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordaining, consecrating, or commissioning of people in such committed partnerships.

- We listened to the voices of those who believe that changes in our standards and practices will be a rejection of biblical authority and traditional teachings.
- We listened to the voices of those who fear that the decisions this church takes will result in division.
- We listened to the voices of those who offered heartfelt arguments for affirming the sexuality and committed relationships of people who are homosexual and for opening the doors of the church's ministries to them.
- We listened to those who offered their hopeful suggestions of how we can live together with our differences.
- We listened to the voices of those individuals and their family members who spoke of the pain of rejection and disdain suffered because of their sexual orientation. Indeed, we came to understand how this study itself is yet another source of that pain.
- We listened to other messages from other voices recorded in the pages that follow.

**We heard** these voices, the voices of the baptized children of God.

- We heard the voices of those who stand side by side in worship to confess, "We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves," and then eagerly await the words of absolution: "In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins." (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness")
- We heard the voices that speak from consciences bound to the Word of God, which they all treasure as the inspired norm of faith and life.
- We heard the voices of Christians who seek the grace of God to live a life worthy of their calling.

**We paid careful attention to the results of the study** in working toward our recommendations. For, beyond a statistical account of our differences, our goal was to seek to understand our differences and to find a way for us to be the body of Christ with those differences. Our first recommendation challenges the ELCA to recognize our differences, without either glossing over them or letting them divide us.

In all the struggles of difficult decisions and tragic choices in an imperfect world, our judgment is clouded by the reality of sin and our grasp is limited by the simple fact that we are finite creatures. In the end our source of courage for making such choices as a Christian community and as individuals is the promise of our Lord that he is with us (Matthew 28:20), that we have the Spirit to guide us (John 16:12-13), and that the certainty we possess is the certainty of God's promise in the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:4-9).

### **Responses to the Study**

The overall input the task force received confirmed that the main points most frequently raised in discussions about the church and homosexuality are represented in the study booklet *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two*. Respondents brought insights from our Lutheran heritage, the history of the church, scientific research, personal experience, and, occasionally, reflections on biblical resources other than those usually discussed in debates about homosexual conduct. Some wrote extensive papers, some sent books, and some sent videos. *(For an account of all responses, please consult Part Six.)*

The majority of the responses expressed **opposition** to the blessing of same-sex unions and to the ordaining, commissioning, or consecrating of people in such partnerships. However, a significant number of responses expressed **approval** of such practices. Others proposed **alternatives** that would permit those congregations or synods that wish to call partnered gay and lesbian candidates to do so without making it the policy of the whole church. Still others counseled **delay** in decision or gave **no opinion**. *(For a review of the basic arguments and other concerns participants in the study expressed in their responses, please see Part Five.)*

The task force members came to recognize that the biblical-theological case for wholesale change in this church's current standards has not been made to the satisfaction of the majority of participants in the study. This judgment correlates with other data of ELCA opinion on matters of sexuality from correspondence, e-mail, hearings, forums, and communication with bishops and other leaders. It also corresponds to the weight of opinion among our ecumenical partner churches and the partner churches of the Lutheran World Federation.

Therefore, our recommendations do not involve new policy or changes to existing policy.

While the responses to the study show a majority in favor of present practices and standards, there is, however, neither a consensus—a general agreement—nor any emerging consensus on these practices and standards. This observation takes us to the next point in our rationale: the concern for conscience.

### **Concern for Conscience**

When Christians disagree about an ethical issue of this magnitude, one important category for determining the policy of the church may be the recognition that participants in this debate are disagreeing not out of pride or selfish desires, but because their consciences are bound to particular interpretations of Scripture and tradition. The careful way Luther approached moral dilemmas (e.g., in *The Estate of Marriage* [Luther's Works 45: 17-49] or *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* [Luther's Works 46: 93-137]) showed a genuine concern for the integrity of conscience. Indeed, in his own defense at the Diet of Worms he declared himself bound in conscience by the Word of God and further stated that, "it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience." (Luther's Works 32: 112) In this concern for conscience Luther reflected the same respect for conscience reflected in the Bible.<sup>†</sup>

In the responses of our sisters and brothers in this church we heard articulate, good-faith statements of consciences bound to the Word of God. For some this meant profound respect for the boundaries they understand the Bible to have set regarding sexual conduct. For others the radical inclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ is decisive in the face of serious questions about how biblical statements apply to today's understanding of sexual orientation. At stake here is the deeply serious question of whether or not all homosexual sexual conduct is inherently sinful. Some read the Bible as saying it is. Others read the Bible as saying that sinfulness in sexual relations is a matter of the quality of that relationship: Is it committed, loving, and just, or not? (*For more on these matters, see Part Five.*)

**Therefore, though our recommendations do not establish new policy or change existing policy, they do appeal for respect for one another's bound consciences as a matter of pastoral concern.**

### **The Bible and Our Call to Discernment**

The 1980 social statement of the American Lutheran Church, *Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior*, states that, "While we see no scriptural rationale for revising the church's traditional teaching that homosexual erotic behavior violates God's intent, we nonetheless remain open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights."

In the spirit of this commitment of openness to new insights as part of our ongoing call to discernment, we turn to some thoughts on the Bible and the current discussion.

Key to our understanding of the Bible is that it is centered in Jesus Christ and that it speaks to us in law and gospel. (*Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 2.02) The law not only accuses us of sin; it also points to God's will for humankind. As Lutherans, we understand that God's gracious concern is also present in the law, which expresses God's concern for life,

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<sup>†</sup>See 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-29 and Romans 14: 23b, where some translate "whatever does not proceed from *conviction* is sin." The Greek word here, usually translated "faith," as in the New Revised Standard Version, can in this context be rendered "conviction" which is, some argue, virtually the equivalent of conscience.

health, good order, and community. (Deuteronomy 5:33) The sexual laws of Leviticus 18 have the same rationale. (Leviticus 18:5)

Thus, we affirm the biblical teaching of God's gift of marriage as "a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman." (*A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions*, 1996) The heterosexual order of creation was given for our good then and now. When the law speaks against adultery and other misuses of our sexuality it supports the values intended in the creation. Lustful and exploitative sexual conduct shows a self-centered lack of trust in God and a lack of love for neighbor that is a clear expression of the sinful condition that holds us all in its grip.

We hold tight to these biblical insights even as we try to discern how they speak to us in the present.

Though there are differences among task force members regarding the interpretation of the Bible for the present circumstances, all accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life. We are also agreed upon the importance of the interpretive principles set forth in the study booklet *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality* (pp. 8–11). Moreover, all would agree that it is the ongoing vocation of the church in its proclamation, teaching, and ministry to discern how the Word of God speaks to the human situation as we understand and experience it in our time and place.

The fact that members of the task force and others in the church share these principles of biblical interpretation does not mean that using them will lead everyone to the same conclusions. There may be differences as to what the text meant originally, its enduring meaning, and the precise way it speaks to the present-day situation. The *Background Essay on Biblical Texts*, by Professors Hultgren and Taylor, provides extensive and detailed evidence of that possibility. (This essay is available on the Web at [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/resources.html](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/resources.html))

Today we recognize that human experience and knowledge can change, as it seems to have, in some ways, with respect to our understanding of sexual orientation. Furthermore, the responses the task force received and our own study of scientific research into sexuality convinced us that there is still much that we do not know or completely understand about sexual orientation. Whatever the church has held in the past, the sort of discussion we are having today is relatively recent. Not long ago there was violent persecution of people identified as homosexual. The ELCA, along with other Christian communities, now repudiates such violence and calls for understanding and acceptance of people of same-sex orientation. Now we are having an unprecedented discussion of blessing committed partnerships between people whose homosexuality many firmly believe is a given.

On the one hand, this emerging consciousness with its confusions and uncertainties requires us to be prayerfully discerning about all sexuality and sexual impulses, lest we deceive ourselves. Pastoral care and guidance will be important in this regard. On the other hand, these developments suggest that there may be a need to allow some "space"

in our practices and attitudes in order for further insights to emerge. So, for example, even though some might not consider it optimal from the standpoint of the traditional teaching of the church, they might be open to the pastoral decision that committed homosexual relationships could be the healthiest choice for those confirmed in their homosexual orientation.

We began this section with the biblical teaching that God’s law is given for our good, that we might flourish. It is in the spirit of that law, and in the spirit of our gospel mission, to draw people in rather than to isolate them.<sup>‡</sup> **We are and remain a welcoming church in which all are invited to participate fully in the life of our congregations.**

Thus, we have offered our first recommendation and the two that follow regarding the blessing of same-sex relationships and the ordaining, consecrating, and commissioning of people in such committed relationships 1) in respect for the conscience-bound convictions of our sisters and brothers in Christ; 2) in a desire to remain engaged with each other in the ongoing discernment of God’s will; and 3) in a desire to remain in community with each other around the life-giving and healing power of Word and Sacrament.

Rather than attempting to resolve our differences through legislative action we have sought to place matters in the realm of pastoral care and to encourage continued engagement as we minister to one another.

### **A Final Note**

It is important to recognize that a pastoral approach regarding these issues prevailed even though various task force members would have preferred other options.

There was support for maintaining present practices and standards. If discipline results in the face of conscience-bound disobedience, it should be carried out graciously and with humility and accepted in the same spirit for the sake of peace.

There was support for some accommodation to ordain, consecrate, or commission people who are in committed same-sex partnerships. Such accommodation might involve procedures for granting exceptions or synodically authorized calls to specific ministry sites, sometimes referred to as ordination to place. Another proposal suggests the establishment of “authorized faith communities.” These communities would have the same rights and responsibilities as congregations of the ELCA, but would permit the ministry of partnered gay and lesbian people serving as rostered leaders in an

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<sup>‡</sup>The time-honored biblical principle of adherence to the spirit rather than simply the letter of the law is also important to keep in mind. Jesus certainly did not dismiss God’s law. He came to fulfill it and he deepened our understanding of its spirit and demand (Matthew 5: 17-48). At the same time, Jesus continually confronted those who insisted on obedience to the strict letter of the law while missing its true spirit (Matthew 9:13; 12:1-7; Mark 3:1-6, for example). It is much the same in the writings of Paul. He upholds the law (Romans 2:13; 1 Corinthians 7:19, for example). He also distinguishes between the spirit and the letter of the law (Romans 2:29; 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6), which law is fulfilled in love of neighbor and in caring for the needs of the neighbor (Galatians 5:14; 6:2).

environment of accountability and ongoing evaluation. Task force members also examined proposals received from respondents advocating local option or a non-geographical synod that would operate with openness to admitting qualified partnered gay and lesbian people to its rostered ministries.

There was support for revising *Vision and Expectations* and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* by removing the statements that specifically mention people who are homosexual and leave all single people aspiring to or rostered in the ministries of this church under the same commitment to chastity.

## Part Three - Dissenting Positions

Although there were sufficient votes in the task force for the passage of all three recommendations by a large margin, there have always been differing views among the members. These views have been expressed repeatedly throughout the months of our deliberations as we struggled to reach agreement on recommendations that would be best for the ELCA at this time.

There are two dissenting positions strongly held by members of the task force, which their consciences will not allow to go unstated. For some, these positions led them to vote against the task force recommendations. For others, it was a matter of wanting the dissenting position to be voiced. We present these positions within this report as a way to offer a more complete picture of our discussions and to give clearer voice to the positions of conscience that are held among us. We know that these positions are held throughout the church and we hope that by their inclusion, others who hold them will know that their voice has been heard in the work of the task force.

In each case, the dissenting position and its rationale indicates an entirely different direction for the church from the task force recommendations. We have tried to present a concise but full expression of each position in order to honor the conscience-bound faithfulness that is expressed in these strong beliefs. The members who hold these dissenting positions are valued members of our task force whose voices and integrity have been critical to the fullness and honesty of our study and conversation. We have been blessed by the sharing of these views in the context of our work together, and we pray that all those who read this report will receive both views in the spirit of mutual respect in which they were regarded in the work of the task force.

### Position One

#### Preface

*Given the lack of unanimity, consensus, or even (in some cases) a simple majority for change in practices and policies regarding the blessing of same-sex relationships and the ordaining, consecrating, or commissioning of people in such committed relationships among the task force, theologians, the bishops and clergy, the seminaries, the laity and congregations, synods, the wider Lutheran community, and the ecumenical Christian community, if the Holy Spirit is speaking a new word in this time and place, many in the community are not hearing it. Therefore, this recommendation is offered as a dissenting alternative to the recommendations passed by the task force.*

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality should recommend that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- 1) Affirm and uphold current policy and practices consistent with past understandings of *Vision and Expectations, Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, and the social statements of the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church.**

- 2) **Admonish individuals, communities, congregations, and synods that any discipline that may result in response to actions contrary to those policies be undertaken with all humility in the knowledge that we see through the glass darkly. May we forgive as we wish to be forgiven. Remembering the log in our own eye, may Christian charity guide our ways; and**
- 3) **Beseech individuals, communities, congregations, and synods, who for reasons of conscience will act contrary to the aforementioned policies, to graciously accept and endure the discipline of the church for the sake of peace, secure in the knowledge “that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18)**

## **Position Two**

### Preface

It is understood that celibacy is a gift that is not given to all people. To expect celibacy from all homosexual people while expecting it only of single heterosexual people is an unequal application of standards when homosexual people are in a monogamous relationship that has the same expectations of love and fidelity as a heterosexual marriage. Underlying this conviction is the additional belief that the condemnation of same-sex conduct in the Bible does not refer to people of homosexual orientation in committed relationships who embrace biblical principles of love, fidelity, and justice in these relationships.

**The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality should recommend that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approve the following change in the *Vision and Expectations* document of our church in Section III: The Ordained Minister as Person and Example:**

- 1) **Remove the last sentence of the subsection Sexual Conduct which states: “Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.”**
- 2) **Develop a revision to the *Vision and Expectations* document that details the chaste and faithful behaviors that are expected of a rostered leader regardless of whether that person is heterosexual or homosexual.**

### Commentary

Were this recommendation to be passed by the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, it would open the door to this church developing rites for the blessing of same-sex unions and developing structures for the inclusion of people in committed same-sex unions in the rostered ministries of the ELCA.



## **Part Four - General Overview of the Task Force Process**

### ***The Establishment of the Study and Task Force***

At the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, voting members from congregations across the ELCA adopted resolutions that called upon this church 1) to study homosexuality with reference to two issues: the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of people in committed same-sex unions; and 2) to develop a social statement on sexuality. (*The study booklet Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality, page 37, contains the full text of these resolutions. This booklet is also available on the Web at [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/study02.html](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/study02.html)*)

In November 2001 and April 2002, the ELCA Church Council bundled the two resolutions into one mandate for study and recommendations. The council called a Director for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and established the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. (*For the full text of the ELCA Church Council actions, go to [www.elca.org/secretary/ChurchCouncil/CCActions.html](http://www.elca.org/secretary/ChurchCouncil/CCActions.html)*)

### **The Study in Perspective**

From the outset the task force was clear, and attempted to make clear to the church, that the study process was indeed a *study*, not a poll or a survey. The experience was to be a time of learning and discerning that would:

- 1) Increase our understanding of how Lutherans understand the Word of God and interpret the Bible;
- 2) Provide reflection on the teachings of our theological heritage;
- 3) Enable greater clarity on the findings and contribution of social and scientific research;
- 4) Help us understand each other better as we explore with one another the diverse views we hold on questions of homosexuality and the church;
- 5) Help the church to discern what is a faithful response to the question of blessing same-sex unions and admitting people in such committed unions into the rostered ministries of the ELCA.

The process of learning and discerning that led to our recommendations was one of integration. The focus was certainly on the responses to the study, but we were also studying along with the church, engaging people in dialogue, listening to the voices at hearings, being attentive to the insights of our bishops, and keeping ourselves aware of the state of the discussion among our ecumenical partners, other Christian churches, and the churches of the Lutheran World Federation. The avenues of communication were numerous and extensive.

### **Important Starting Points for the Study**

- We need to remain clear on the distinction between homosexuality, which refers to sexual orientation to people of the same sex, and homosexual conduct, which refers to acts of sexual intimacy between members of the same sex. Homosexual orientation in

itself is not something this church has condemned. The question of whether or not all acts of homosexual intimacy are sinful is the question being debated among us.

- People who are homosexual, like the heterosexual majority, are a diverse group in their moral outlook. Our Christian sisters and brothers in this church who are lesbian or gay and who seek the blessing of their unions and the admission of those in such committed unions to the ministries of our church profess a commitment to high moral standards of fidelity, love, and justice in their partnerships. Their access to the possibility of communal recognition and support of their partnerships and the church's ministries is a focus of our study.

### ***Task Force Activities***

Minutes of all task force meetings, along with study materials and other resources developed through the task force, are on the study Web site, [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney). Throughout the study process every effort was made to keep communication open and honest. Meetings of the task force were closed only for a very few sessions when it was necessary to accede to a request for privacy or to prevent premature public reports on the direction of task force deliberations.

#### **Preparation of the Study Booklet**

In preparation for the drafting and publication of *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality*, the task force engaged in a number of educational activities.

- Reading and discussion of representative literature: In addition to biblical study and lengthy commentaries received by the task force from various people and perspectives in the church, the members read and discussed a broad range of materials. A partial list of authors read includes Benne, Burtness, Forde, T. Fretheim, Gagnon, Jersild, Meilaender, Nestingen, Nessian, Nissinen, Scharen, Stortz, Strommen, and, W. Taylor. Task force member Prof. Timothy Wengert, co-editor of the new edition of the *Book of Concord*, presented a historic overview of Lutheran teaching on the orders of creation and a review of what the Lutheran Confessions have to say about marriage and related subjects. Dr. Julio Fonseca, a member of the task force and a clinical psychologist, provided a lengthy compendium of the research on sexual orientation. Documents from other church bodies were shared as they became available. A variety of videos from different sources and perspectives were also shared.
- Exchange and discussion of papers: Early in the work of the task force, members prepared brief papers in which they set forth what they believed were the best arguments for maintaining present standards and the best arguments for making changes in those standards. The necessity of having to articulate a position that may not be one's own and of having to be clear about the most important points laid the foundation for productive dialogue among members.
- Dialogue with visiting panels: Panels representing a cross section of views were invited to dialogue with the task force. The panels included: a) pastors advocating a

traditional stance; b) representatives from organizations advocating on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people; c) researchers and clinicians concerned with sexual orientation; d) visitors concerned with the recovery of victims of sexual abuse; e) theologians representing different viewpoints; f) a clinician engaged in counseling with people seeking to move out of their gay life and two people who believe they have succeeded in doing so.

- Process leading to publication of the study booklet: a) task force members staffed two different subcommittees to settle on content and to engage in drafting; b) all task force members provided input throughout the process of composition; c) all members agreed to the final text before and after final editing.

While the ELCA was engaged in the study process:

- Task force members each did the study themselves or in their congregations and shared their response forms with one another.
- Two sub-committees began exploration of various proposals that were emerging from the responses to the study.

### **Communication**

Prior to the release of *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two*, and to a lesser degree afterward, the task force, the director, and the Office of the Presiding Bishop received well over a thousand letters, e-mails, and other forms of communication such as papers, published articles, petitions, and declarations of conviction to which individuals and sometimes congregations had subscribed. Regular reports of this communication and representative examples were supplied to the members of the task force. All communication was made available to them and will be kept in the ELCA archives. Every effort was made to send on those communications that were addressed to the task force directly or carried the request that it be given to them. Members were kept up to date on the responses of study participants as they came in.

The director and members of the task force reported regularly on their contacts throughout the ELCA. The director was engaged in forums in thirty different synods covering every region of the church. A number of campus, congregational, and conference venues provided further opportunity for dialogue. Some thirty conference-call “chats” with the director were held with synodical leaders in various synods, Women of the ELCA leadership, and Lutheran Men in Mission leadership.

Many members of the task force engaged in discussions and gave presentations of the issues throughout the church at the synodical and congregational level. The task force also met with the Conference of Bishops in October 2004.

Synods were offered an opportunity to hold hearings while the study was in progress. Fourteen synods did so. The director or a member of the task force was present at each of these hearings to listen and take notes along with the synodically appointed note taker. The accounts of these hearings were supplied in writing to all members of the task force.

Discussions and resolutions in synod assemblies became another source of communication regarding the views and concerns of ELCA members.

Task force members were kept up to date on developments in other churches and in the churches of the Lutheran World Federation:

- An ecumenical meeting of representatives from other church bodies was held in April 2004 to share developments and views on matters of homosexuality in the church. A report of this meeting was shared with the task force.
- The director and other executive staff advisory to the task force were present at the 2003 Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, where the issue of homosexuality and the church was discussed among global Lutheran partners. This too became a source of information for task force members.

### ***Participation in the Study***

While an exact figure of actual participants is not possible, we know that there were over 100,000 copies of the study booklet in circulation. More than 100,000 printed copies were distributed or sold and there is no way of knowing how many were downloaded from the Web site or reproduced from published copy or downloaded copy. Therefore, while the number of response forms returned was over 28,000, there is every reason to believe that far more actually participated.

This amount of response is far greater than the response to any previous study conducted by the ELCA. Although there was certainly some resistance to participation, a significant number of individuals and congregations representing a large cross section of our church did participate.

### ***Processing the Responses***

Theologically trained volunteer readers, task force members, staff of the ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation, and the director were involved in reading responses to questions which invited written responses.<sup>§</sup> All forms were read. A statistically significant number of these were coded according to the categories that appear in ***Part Six***, which provides a complete account of the sorts of responses received, including items that simply asked respondents to check the appropriate response.

All response forms will be kept in the ELCA archives.

It is important to note that, while the percentages of people or groups expressing one view or another was of great importance to the deliberations of the task force, what people said in support of their views was also important. Furthermore, the valuable insights of any given response often in and of itself represented a real contribution to task force deliberations. Finally, the attitudes toward the study reported by the participants were gratifying.

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<sup>§</sup>“Given what you have learned from this study about the various views among members of the ELCA, what course do you think our church should follow?” and, “Please write any additional comments....” (*Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two*, pp. 46–47)

**Over 83 percent of the respondents felt that the study document did a fair or good job of representing their views.** (Some may have interpreted “fair” to mean “balanced”—we received a good deal of written and verbal comment to that effect—and some may have meant “fair” as “okay,” but less than “good.”) **Nearly three quarters of respondents also said that the study helped them to better understand the views of other people—they learned something.** These are gratifying responses that remind us of the value individuals and congregations derived from the study experience itself.

## **Part Five – Basic Arguments and Additional Concerns Raised by Respondents to the Study**

This section attempts to summarize the arguments that have been shared with the task force by participants in the study, and also to highlight additional concerns that have been raised by those participants. This information complements the full statistical summary, which is included in this report in the next section, Part Six.

### ***Basic Arguments from Study Participants***

Fewer than half of the respondents gave reasons for the positions they took. However, those who did respond gave us a fairly clear picture of our differences.

Those who oppose the blessing of same-sex unions and the rostering of people in such unions most frequently base their position on 1) the biblical texts that condemn same-sex sexual conduct, and 2) the biblical doctrine of creation, which it is argued establishes once and for all the complementarity of male and female in marital union as God's will in the order of creation. Some also pointed out that this understanding of biblical teaching on the subject has been upheld by the tradition of the church throughout the ages.

Those who affirm homosexuality and homosexual relationships point out that the biblical writers did not know of our modern understanding of sexual orientation as a “given” rather than a choice. Therefore, those texts that condemn certain homosexual acts do not necessarily condemn all expressions of homosexuality, as we know it today. The Bible does not have in mind committed, loving relationships between gay and lesbian Christians for whom their homosexuality is natural and good. In fact there are no passages that address such committed relationships. God's decision in creation that people need loving companionship (Genesis 2:18) pertains to homosexually oriented people as well, even though the text does not speak directly in those terms. As the apostles saw that the Gentiles should receive full acceptance in the church because it was clear that they had the Holy Spirit (Acts 15: 8-9), so also experience of our devoted and faithful homosexual sisters and brothers has prompted many to proclaim the same acceptance of them. The morality of homosexual relationships should be judged by the same biblically based qualities of fidelity, love, and justice that we expect in Christian marriages.\*

Opponents of blessing committed gay and lesbian partnerships and granting access to people in such unions to this church's ministries sometimes say that the claim that sexual orientation is “given” is overstated. That is, they contend that there are actually fewer

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\*The “orders of creation” God has established, which includes the institution of marriage, have come to be understood by Lutheran theologians as God's providential ordering of life through the civil use of the law to provide a curb against the excesses of human sinfulness. Advocates of gay and lesbian unions thus argue that the “order” of marriage does not mean that no other type of union is possible. Rather, the purpose of the order of marriage in safeguarding healthy and stable relationships for the common good can just as readily be applied to normalizing homosexual partnerships.

confirmed homosexual people than is often claimed and more who have benefited or can benefit from reparative therapy than is often admitted. Since there is no clear scientific explanation as to why people are homosexual, we should be cautious about what can be claimed. It is also hard to maintain with certainty, even though the language of sexual orientation is recent, that the biblical writers who condemned certain same-sex acts knew nothing of people who were constitutively homosexual in orientation. Be that as it may, even if we concede that homosexual orientation is a given for some, scriptural condemnation of same-sex acts and the absence of any positive biblical appraisal of homosexual sexual relations leads some respondents to the conclusion that homosexual orientation is a defect of nature in a fallen world infected by human sin. (One might appeal to Romans 8:20ff. for a text that speaks of the dire effects of human sin on the whole of creation.) Therefore, we must judge all same-sex intercourse to be inherently sinful regardless of the quality of the relationship in which it occurs. People who are homosexual in orientation should abstain from sexual relations and/or seek help to cope or change. Some add to this that gay and lesbian people have the “cross to bear” but, “God gives strength to people to bear their crosses.”

Those who favor blessing same-sex unions and admitting people in such unions to the rostered ministries of the ELCA reject the idea that homosexuality is a defect of life in a fallen world and that all same-sex acts are therefore inherently sinful. They point out that this is nowhere directly stated in the Bible; it is an inference drawn from certain texts that simply leads us back to the dispute over how these texts speak to us in terms of present understandings. Moreover, some would say that homosexuality is a part of God’s good creation. A number of respondents voiced the feeling that the exclusion of gay and lesbian people from the blessing of their unions in the church and from the ministries of the church was simply out of step with the teaching of Jesus and the inclusiveness of the gospel.

### *Further Concerns*

As we have seen, some see homosexuality as part of God’s good creation and committed same-sex unions as a positive expression of love and companionship. Others see all same-sex conduct as an expression of brokenness and unacceptable sinful behavior. Still others recognize homosexuality as a part of our broken creation suffering the consequences of human sin. However, they find that some sort of recognition of the needs of people who are homosexual to have companionship and intimacy in their lives may be the best kind of pastoral care. Thus, though we are on record as a “welcoming church,” these differences find expression in how welcoming is differently interpreted in understanding and practice. Some congregations and pastors accept gay and lesbian people without judgment, entrust them with leadership roles, and will bless their relationships with congregational support. Other congregations and pastors are accepting in the spirit of the gospel but not with total approval. Still others are welcoming in terms of pastoral care for these sinners who are encouraged to repent, mend their ways, and urged, in some cases, to seek reparative therapy.

In the matters before us deliberation is further complicated by what we have learned in this study of our differences in measuring the role of experience. Some would argue that

the experience of faithful gay and lesbian Christians should point to their full acceptance in the church, its rites, and ministries. Others downplay the importance of experience and point to fallen human nature and our tendencies to confuse Christian experience of God's Word with human feelings that easily deceive us.

Some who oppose recognition or blessing of same-sex unions raise fears concerning the stability of homosexual unions and the impact on child development in families where both parents are the same sex. Others who have a different experience take the opposite view and can cite studies showing that research does not support this fear. However, such research is often disputed.

Some express the fear that sexually confused youth will be influenced toward a premature conclusion that they are homosexual if their pastor or youth leader is a partnered gay or lesbian whose committed relationship has the church's approval. Others contend that there is no evidence to support those fears.

Some think that traditional teaching on marriage will be undermined by the acceptance of same-sex unions. Others envision a renewal in fidelity for all unions and an opportunity to offer a healthy and stable life of companionship and intimacy for homosexual couples.

Some support their opposition to the acceptance and blessing of same-sex unions by pointing to promiscuous and dangerous homosexual conduct, resulting in clinical problems and diseases like AIDS. Others point out that no one is approving such behavior in our church's discussion and one can point to similar dangerous behaviors among heterosexuals.

Some believe that we need to pay more attention to the programs of reparative therapy and the stories of those who have experienced it. Others believe that we have not done a sufficient job of presenting the scientific case for homosexuality as a given orientation and for what they believe is the demonstrable failure of reparative therapy.

These concerns have been taken seriously by the task force and will certainly remain as a part of the ongoing dialogue.



**Part Six – Report of Response Form Data  
Received from *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two*  
by November 1, 2004**

The *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two* study booklet included a response form which could be used to provide feedback to the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. There was a three-page paper form in the back of the study guide and a response form was also provided on the Web. By November 1, 2004, paper responses received numbered 21,874, and Web responses received numbered 6,287. All these response forms were read. We determined that four analytical reports would be written to assist the task force with their work. These reports were written in March, June, September, and December 2004. To provide results with confidence, we tried to include 1,000 response forms in each report. In March, that meant analyzing every survey. In December, every tenth survey was analyzed. Overall, 3,956 (14.0%) of all response forms were coded and combined into a single computer file for analysis. Paper forms were keyed in and the Web forms were already in a useable electronic format. Having 3,956 responses to analyze in this report allows us to say with 95% confidence that the percentages in the report are within  $\pm 1.5\%$  of the percentage we would have gotten if we had analyzed all 28,000 forms. This exceeds the levels used by many national research organizations which use samples of 1,500 resulting in 95% confidence that they are within  $\pm 3.0\%$ .

**Profile of all responses**

1. Total number of responses coded was 3,956.
  - 79.5% were paper forms
  - 20.5% were filed on the Web
  
2. Responses to question one: “Did you complete the study process on your own or with others in a group?”
  - 4.0% didn't indicate who they were answering for
  - 12.6% were from persons who completed the study on their own
  - 77.2% were from persons who participated in a group but the answers represented their own opinions, not the group's
  - 6.2% represent the opinion of the group

## Responses from Individuals

### Profile—individual responses

#### 3a. Self description

- 2.6% age 24 or younger
- 14.8% age 25 to 44
- 42.3% age 45 to 64
- 40.3% age 65 and older
  
- 43.7% male
- 56.3% female
  
- 1.6% were Asian or Pacific Islander
- 1.6% were Black or African American
- 1.8% were Latino/Latina
- 1.3% were American Indian or Alaska Native
- 93.7% were White or Caucasian

#### 3b. Regional identification

- 6.4% lived in the Great Plains
- 5.4% Mid-Atlantic
- 46.4% Midwest
- 2.2% New England
- 7.5% Northeast
- 7.3% Northwest
- 11.6% South and Southeast
- 7.1% Southwest
- 5.6% West
- 0.4% Caribbean

### Understandings and Attitudes—individual responses

#### 4. Responses to question six: “As you think about what you believe about human sexuality, how well were those beliefs represented in the study documents?”

- 16.1% didn't see their beliefs about human sexuality expressed in the study documents (It didn't come close)
- 46.5% felt that the document did a fair job of representing their beliefs about human sexuality
- 37.4% felt that the documents did a good job of representing their beliefs about human sexuality

5. Responses to question seven: “Did the study experience help you better understand the views of other people within the ELCA?”

- 73.4% felt that they better understood the views of other people (They learned something)
- 21.1% felt that they already understood the views presented (They didn't learn anything)
- 5.4% expressed another opinion

### **Recommended Course for the ELCA—individual responses**

6. Responses to question eight: “Given what you have learned from this study about the various views among members of the ELCA, what course do you think our church should follow?”

- 38.2% Oppose the blessing of same sex unions or admitting of persons in committed same-sex unions into the rostered ministries of the church (blessing and rostering)
- 14.7% Welcome persons into the fellowship of the church but do not bless or roster
- 2.1% Oppose blessing and rostering and when welcoming homosexual persons into the church, confront them about their sin
- 0.7% The leadership of the church should issue strong statements regarding the provisions in Vision and Expectations and discipline synods, congregations and pastors that do not follow the policy
- 0.7% Encourage gay and lesbian persons to seek reorientation therapy
- 18.2% Favor blessing and rostering
- 1.1% Favor blessing and rostering, but doesn't feel that it should be done at this time as it might split the church
- 0.1% Retain the provisions in Vision and Expectations for the majority of the ELCA, but provide a locus such as a non geographic synod for congregations who are willing to be served by rostered persons living in committed same sex unions
- 3.0% Provide for a local congregation to decide whether it wishes to call a rostered person living in a committed same sex union and/or bless same sex unions
- 0.4% Provide for a synod to approve persons in committed same sex unions for a roster of the church
- 2.1% Adopt policy that approves the blessing while not approving rostering
- 0.5% Do not enact new policy but recognize that in some settings pastoral discretion may lead to the blessing of same sex unions
- 0.9% Take action that will not be implemented until a churchwide assembly adopts a statement on sexuality. Implement the action if it is consistent with the new sexuality statement
- 4.4% Continue the study/delay decision at this time
- 0.9% Table the issue for a specific time period
- 12.1% No Opinion/Undecided/No comment written in

7. Overall, the opinions of the individual respondents regarding changing the current policy are:

	Oppose Blessing and Rostering	Favor Blessing and Rostering	Alternate	Delay/No Opinion
All individual responses	56.2%	23.2%	3.6%	17.2%
age 24 or younger	27.0%	42.7%	4.5%	25.8%
age 25-44	50.1%	28.3%	3.1%	18.5%
age 45-64	55.9%	25.6%	3.7%	15.8%
age 65 or older	61.5%	17.7%	3.6%	17.2%
Male	58.0%	19.9%	3.4%	18.7%
Female	54.1%	25.6%	3.9%	16.5%
Asian or Pacific Islander	43.1%	21.6%	0.0%	35.3%
Black or African American	41.5%	26.4%	1.9%	30.2%
Latino/Latina	54.2%	20.3%	1.7%	23.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	46.3%	31.7%	2.4%	19.5%
White or Caucasian	56.3%	23.3%	3.8%	16.6%

	Oppose Blessing and Rostering	Favor Blessing and Rostering	Alternate	Delay/No Opinion
live in the Great Plains	52.8%	19.3%	5.5%	22.5%
Mid-Atlantic	52.5%	25.1%	4.4%	18.0%
Midwest	56.9%	23.5%	3.6%	16.0%
New England	46.7%	34.7%	2.7%	16.0%
Northeast	52.2%	25.9%	2.7%	19.2%
Northwest	55.6%	24.2%	3.6%	16.5%
South and Southeast	64.0%	15.2%	3.3%	17.5%
Southwest	58.8%	21.7%	2.5%	17.1%
West	50.3%	31.4%	3.7%	14.7%
Caribbean	14.3%	42.9%	0.0%	42.9%

8. Using the handwritten comments, the number of respondents who indicated that the position of the church should be based on:

- 25.1% Scriptural passages/concepts
- 4.8% Scripture using current experience & knowledge when interpreting passages
- 7.6% Current day experiences
- 2.2% Doctrine
- 3.1% The tradition of the church

9. Question 11 asked for any additional comments. Respondents indicated the following positions:

- 2.4% Blessing unions will undercut the institution of marriage
- 2.1% If blessing same sex unions is approved, the policy should identify this as different than marriage
- 3.9% Written material and opinions of the leadership of the church are biased toward blessing and rostering
- 1.4% This study and possible change in policy is confusing people, particularly the youth
- 0.7% If blessing and/or rostering is approved, our congregation will leave the ELCA
- 4.0% If blessing and/or rostering is approved, I will transfer my membership from the ELCA
- 7.4% If blessing and/or rostering is approved, the ELCA will be divided
- 0.2% Any action taken by the churchwide assembly should be ratified by local congregational votes
- 0.4% Any action taken should be based on the vote of all members of the ELCA
- 1.1% The majority of the church does not wish to have changes in *Visions and Expectations*
- 0.1% The majority of the church wishes to have blessing and rostering changed
- 1.1% If blessing and rostering is approved it will impact ecumenical relationships and relations with Lutheran churches throughout the world
- 12.7% Homosexuality is a sin.

## Responses from Groups

### Profile—group responses

The number of responses received that represented the opinions of a group was 209. These responses represented the opinions of approximately 4,696 people.

10. Responses to question two: “How many participants were in the group?”

- 7.4% were from groups of 2-5
- 21.4% were from groups of 6-10
- 23.5% were from groups of 11-15
- 47.7% were from groups of 16 or more

11. Responses to question three: “Describe the discussion group.”

- 37.2% a Sunday school class or a forum
- 43.0% another congregational group meeting
- 10.3% a group at a conference or a synod assembly
- 9.5% other

12. In question four the respondents identified the leader of the group as:

- 78.3% a pastor
- 19.6% a layperson
- 2.1% indicated that the respondent was unsure

13. Question five asked how many people of the following characteristics were in the group?

- 5.0% age 24 or younger
- 18.8% age 25 to 44
- 40.5% age 45 to 64
- 35.7% age 65 or older
- 42.8% male
- 57.2% female
- 1.7% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 2.2% Black or African American
- 1.3% Latino/Latina
- 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 94.1% White or Caucasian

#### **Understandings and Attitudes—group responses**

14. Group responses to question six: “As you think about what you believe about human sexuality, how well were those beliefs represented in the study documents?”

- 18.2% didn't see their beliefs about human sexuality expressed in the study documents. (It didn't come close.)
- 50.6% felt that the document did a fair job of representing their beliefs about human sexuality.
- 31.2% felt that the documents did a good job of representing their beliefs about human sexuality.

15. Group responses to question seven: “Did the study experience help you better understand the views of other people within the ELCA?”

- 74.6% felt that they better understood the views of other people. (They learned something.)
- 18.5% felt that they already understood the views presented. (They didn't learn anything.)
- 6.9% expressed another opinion.

## Recommended Course for the ELCA—group responses

16. Group responses to question eight: “Given what you have learned from this study about the various views among members of the ELCA, what course do you think our church should follow?”

- 41.8% Oppose the blessing of same sex unions or admitting of persons in committed same-sex unions into the rostered ministries of the church (blessing and rostering)
- 16.8% Welcome persons into the fellowship of the church but do not bless or roster
- 2.0% Oppose blessing and rostering and when welcoming homosexual persons into the church, confront them about their sin
- 1.6% The leadership of the church should issue strong statements regarding the provisions in Vision and Expectations and discipline synods, congregations and pastors that do not follow the policy
- 0.4% Encourage gay and lesbian persons to seek reorientation therapy
- 13.5% Favor blessing and rostering
- 2.5% Provide for a local congregation to decide whether it wishes to call a rostered person living in a committed same sex union and/or bless same sex unions
- 0.8% Adopt policy that approves the blessing while not approving rostering
- 1.2% Take action that will not be implemented until a churchwide assembly adopts a statement on sexuality. Implement the action if it is consistent with the new sexuality statement
- 3.7% Continue the study/delay decision at this time
- 0.4% Table the issue for a specific time period
- 15.2% No Opinion/Undecided/No comment written in

**The total responses coded as of November 1, 2004 is 3,956. They advocate:**

Oppose Blessing and <u>Rostering</u>	Favor Blessing and <u>Rostering</u>	Alternate	Delay/No Opinion
57.0%	22.1%	3.4%	17.4%

**When tracked by date, the opinions expressed are:**

	Oppose Blessing and <u>Rostering</u>	Favor Blessing and <u>Rostering</u>	Alternate	Delay/No Opinion
Prior to March, 2004	56.0%	21.8%	4.3%	17.9%
April – June, 2004	60.4%	23.8%	5.0%	10.8%
July – September 10, 2004	57.8%	19.2%	3.3%	19.8%
September 11 – November 1, 2004	57.1%	24.2%	2.8%	16.0%

These four snapshots of respondents are quite consistent over time and increase confidence in the accuracy of the findings of this research report.



**Frequently Asked Questions about the  
Report and Recommendations  
from the  
Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality  
January 13, 2005**

The following are questions and answers designed to help leaders understand and interpret the Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality.

**1. Now that we have the task force report and recommendations what happens next?**

The task force has issued the report early in the year so that individuals and congregations can study it and determine if they want to share reactions with their synod councils and voting members to their synod assemblies. Synods may take initiatives to memorialize the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to comment on the recommendations or advocate a different course of action.

In the meantime the Conference of Bishops and the boards of the ELCA Divisions for Church in Society and Ministry will review the report before the ELCA Church Council decides in April what resolutions it wants to send on to the August 2005 Churchwide Assembly in response to the task force recommendations. It is important to recognize that it is the responsibility of the task force to make its report and recommendations; it is the church which will decide any course of action.

**2. What is the purpose of the first recommendation of the task force?**

The task force is keenly aware of the deep divisions of opinion in this church on matters of homosexuality. Even though a majority of the respondents to the study do not wish to change our traditional position, a significant minority wants us to either 1) bless same-sex unions and admit people in such unions into the rostered ministries of the ELCA or 2) allow for pastoral discretion in the blessing of same-sex unions and make an accommodation by allowing for some form of exception or local option to admit people in such unions to the rostered ministries of the ELCA. Still others are open to change but feel we should delay and some offer no opinion. In short, we do not have general agreement or what we call consensus.

Consequently, the task force believes that this church must first decide, before all else, if it is committed to living and working together with our differences for the sake of our common mission and our God-given unity in Christ.

**3. The recommendations on blessing same-sex unions and ordaining, consecrating, or commissioning people in such unions say they recommend no policy change. Is that really true?**

The task force is recommending that we do not attempt to resolve our differences by legislating practice and policy at the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. It recognizes in the report that the case for change in the present policy has not been made to the satisfaction of the majority. Therefore, it is not proposing any changes. Rather it is suggesting that this church allow for pastoral response in all these matters as a way of respecting each other's consciences while seeking to remain engaged in mission together as the ELCA.

**4. The report asks that all respect each other's conscience-bound convictions but can't consciences be in error if not informed by the Word of God?**

Yes, consciences can err. In our situation, people of differing convictions on these issues each in their own way rely on the Word of God as the basis for their views. Thus, there are sincere differences of interpretation among people in this church who share a common commitment to the authority of Scripture. The report appeals to the leaders and members of this church to respect those differences as matters of conscience as we continue to engage each other and work together in the mission of the gospel.

**5. Why doesn't the task force report and recommendations simply state that homosexual sexual conduct is a sin?**

There are those who clearly think all homosexual conduct is sinful and that has been the traditional teaching. Some take the opposite view that it is not sinful if it occurs within a loving and faithful covenant of union. Still others, while seeing homosexual unions as less than optimum, may see prayerful support for them in the church as the healthiest choice and a way to include and embrace gay and lesbian people and their families. Once again, the task force report does not recommend that we resolve these differences by a vote at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

**6. What can we say about these recommendations to gay and lesbian people and those who support their desire to participate fully in this church?**

Every member of the task force sincerely acknowledges the love of God for all people, homosexual and heterosexual, and strongly affirms their welcome in the life of the ELCA. Neither among themselves nor in this church did the task force find a consensus for changing the church's policies on blessings or on ordination, consecration and commissioning. Nevertheless, the task force recommendations are intended to help create a space for respectful conversation and for continuing participation while acknowledging the disappointment and pain that many feel.

**7. How reliable was this study process? Wouldn't a poll have been better?**

The 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly determined that we should study the matters before us and grow thereby in our ability to learn from one another to better understand the issues we confront.

The fact that we had over 28,000 responses—far greater than any previous study this church has done—provides a good cross section of the views held in the ELCA. Moreover, better that 80% of the respondents said they understood each other better as a result. This is a value that a poll could not achieve.

**8. Has the task force given due consideration to other Christian churches here and around the world who support or are opposed to recognizing same-sex unions in the church and admitting partnered gay and lesbian people into the ministries of the church?**

The task force has been keeping up with the views of other church bodies and of partner churches in the Lutheran World Federation.

**9. What about other concerns raised by respondents and studied by the task force but not addressed in the recommendations?**

The task force was directed by the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to produce a social statement on human sexuality which is scheduled to come to the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly for discussion and action. The task force still has this work ahead of it. In that process, concerns that have surfaced in this study will be part of the agenda for the task force's future work.

**10. What is the significance of having two dissenting opinions recorded?**

The task force was unanimous in its judgment that the task force effort was a good-faith effort. That some task force members felt the need to record dissenting opinions from two very different perspectives is a further sign that the task force reflects some of the same differences that we see in this church. The fact that the task force members graciously embraced both agreement and dissent among themselves embodies the sort of respect for conscience that we are encouraging among members of this church.

**11. How does my synod register response to the report and recommendations of the task force?**

Responses to the report and recommendations will be received according to the constitutional procedures of the ELCA:

Individuals and congregations wishing to respond to the report and recommendations should communicate with their Synod Council. Click here for a list of Synod Council meeting dates and contact information. [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/synodcouncil.html](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/synodcouncil.html)

Synod Councils are invited to express their opinions through resolutions to the ELCA Church Council by March 15, 2005.

The ELCA Church Council will meet in April 2005 and will consider the report, recommendations, and synodical resolutions. It has the responsibility to draft any specific proposals for consideration by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, which meets in August 2005.

Synod Assemblies are encouraged to consider the task force's report and ELCA Church Council's proposed actions and, if they wish, to direct responses through formal memorials to the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.