

Brief Overview: Reconsideration of Social Statement

The Social Statement, Human Sexuality: Gift & Trust was adopted by the 2009 churchwide Assembly. <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexuality>.

For the ELCA, Social Statements are teaching and study documents, not decrees. All of the Social Statements of this church can be seen here: <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>

The Human Sexuality Social Statement covers a broad range of topics, including marriage, sexuality and family, children, divorce, the self, friendship, and sex outside of marriage. Same-gender relationships are discussed in one section out of 23. The Statement considers human sexuality as a gift & trust through the lens of a distinctly Lutheran approach, and considers social structures that enhance social trust, and trust in relationships. It addresses sexuality and social responsibility, including the global sex trade, the commercialization of sex, internet sex, sexual abuse, clergy misconduct, sexually transmitted diseases, and much more. The Social Statement considers the way social structures shelter, sustain, and protect personal, family, and social relationships of love and trustworthiness. From the [statement introduction](#).

The Social Statement recognizes that this church does not have consensus on the matter of same-gender relationships, and that:

- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law. They believe same-gender sexual behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. They therefore conclude that the neighbor and the community are best served by calling people in same-gender sexual relationships to repentance for that behavior and to a celibate lifestyle. Such decisions are intended to be accompanied by pastoral response and community support.
- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that homosexuality and even lifelong, monogamous, homosexual relationships reflect a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended. While they acknowledge that such relationships may be lived out with mutuality and care, they do not believe that the neighbor or community are best served by publicly recognizing such relationships as traditional marriage.
- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are honored and held to high standards and public accountability, but they do not equate these relationships with marriage. They do, however, affirm the need for community support and the role of pastoral care and may wish to surround lifelong, monogamous relationships or covenant unions with prayer.

- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage. They surround such couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe same-gender couples should avail themselves of social and legal support for themselves, their children, and other dependents and seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.

The Social Statement calls for mutual respect in relationships and for guidance that seeks the good of each individual and of the community, accompanying one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.

Thirteen years later, the 2022 Churchwide Assembly authorized 2 reconsiderations of the Social Statement:

- 1) Reconsideration #1 - Editorial. Looks at clarifying word changes only, based on the civil law changes governing same-sex marriages that have been adopted since 2009.
- 2) Reconsideration #2 – Substantive. Looks at the four convictions Lutherans can faithfully hold about same-gender relationships, that is, that people are “conscience-bound” in their beliefs.

“Reconsideration” is the technical term for the process by which we as a church can think again about specific elements in a social statement. It does not mean totally rejecting the Social Statement. It allows the church to thoughtfully, prayerfully, and communally re-examine particular parts of a social teaching document.

This process is JUST beginning. A Task Force has just been appointed by the ELCA Church Council. It is composed of ELCA members who hold a diversity of viewpoints, gender, sex, race/ethnicity, geography, age, and other factors. It is responsible specifically to the Office of the Presiding Bishop and to the ELCA Church Council. Learn more at:

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/FAQ_Human_Sexuality_Reconsiderations_2023.pdf

The Task Force will provide drafts for public comment and include a survey to collect public feedback. They will review all input and then send a proposal to the ELCA Church Council.

If adopted, the Resolutions before the 2024 SW MN Synod Assembly are directed to the Synod Council, which is the body that then communicates with the ELCA Church Council.

The ELCA Church Council will forward recommendations on **Reconsideration #1 to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly**, and **Reconsideration #2 to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly**.