



A Guide for Talking Together about Shared Ministry with Same-Sex Couples and Their Families



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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The Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America wishes to express deep gratitude to the Rev. Dr. R. Gregg Kaufman whose service as primary writer of this resource truly exemplifies what it means to “go the second mile.” Rev. Kaufman is a retired ELCA pastor and university faculty member. He currently serves as a Kettering Foundation Research Associate and is a member of the National Issues Forums Institute network.

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WHY THIS RESOURCE: AN INTRODUCTION

This conversation series is provided in response to requests from synods and congregations seeking conversation guidance and resource sharing about the practice of ministry in light of changing family configurations. These requests arise in a context of social change and a background of churchwide conversation regarding views on human sexuality in general and same-sex¹ relationships in particular.

The benchmark of change within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) includes the social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (HS:GT) and a set of ministry policy resolutions, both adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2009. (See Appendix 2 for important detail.) The benchmark of change within U.S. culture is the 2015 Supreme Court ruling (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015²), which made marriage legal for same-sex couples in all 50 states.

The ELCA is learning what an extraordinary challenge it is to live into being a church that recognizes and lives with a range of varied, diverse, even at times contradictory, understandings and practices. These challenges and opportunities continue to call forth the confident and daring faith Martin Luther described, a faith empowered by God to trust the Spirit to see us through as conversations continue.

Prompted by a resolution from the 2013 Churchwide Assembly that lifted up the concern for pastoral response to changing family configurations, the ELCA Church Council in November 2013 authorized formation of a working group. That working group was charged to return a report and recommendations regarding ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families. One of their recommendations included creation of a constructive conversation resource to guide discernment and dialogue about ministry.

It is easy to understand the need for this guide. ELCA members, like many in this society, hold a wide diversity of perspectives on same-gender relations. Those perspectives run from hostility to celebration of same-sex marriage, with many that lie in between. The "in-between" in this case includes, but is not limited to, traditional views, passive acceptance and those who think this is a non-issue now. In the context of ongoing discernment within the ELCA about the Spirit's guidance on how to regard same-gender relationships, our church recognizes that, "faithful people can and will come to different conclusions about the meaning of Scripture and about what constitutes responsible action" (HS:GT, p. 19). In this context, the social statement identifies a range from traditionalist views to full inclusion as expressions of shared Christian freedom. Likewise, ELCA members and congregations also reflect a range of perspectives, policies and practices in regard to ministry with and to same-gender couples and their families.

Despite this range, all ELCA congregations and members are called as part of the body of Christ "to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection" (HS:GT, p. 19). The presence of same-sex individuals within many congregations, whether quietly or openly, the right to marry, and the increasing concern that gay and lesbian children be accepted for who they are provide challenges and opportunities that congregations cannot ignore.

¹ ELCA documents, reflecting the ongoing shifts in terminology have used a variety of terms, such as "homosexuality," "same-sex" and "same-gender." This study will use these interchangeably since it depends on the wording of previous documents. The term "same-sex" is the most common term as this text goes to publication.

² The court held that "the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the Due Process Clause and Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution."

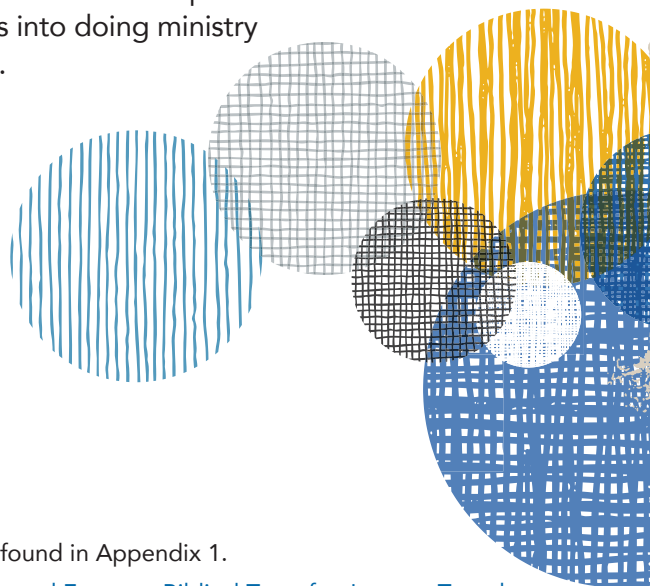
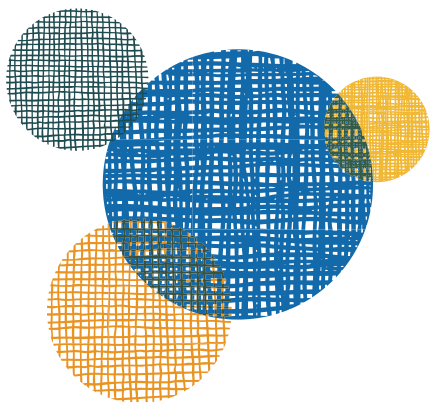
Congregations, then, are being challenged to talk about same-sex issues as never before.

Many congregations have turned to two church-related but independent organizations representing opposite perspectives relative to same-gender marriage and family. Lutheran CORE is a network and voice for Lutherans who advocate traditional views on marriage and oppose religious blessings of same-gender relationships. ReconcilingWorks is a network and voice that promotes inclusion and equity for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Lutherans and strongly affirms marriage of same-sex couples. Both organizations believe they are being faithful to the spirit of scriptural authority, the Lutheran heritage and Jesus' encouragement to love our neighbors.³

However, there is reason to believe that a significant number of congregations as well as their members and leaders are not inclined to affiliate with or use materials solely from either. Many congregations include nearly even mixes of perspectives along the continuum noted above. Many congregations desire to talk about the church's role in a changing cultural landscape through prayerful discernment and respectful dialogue. Many congregations, for the first time, are being challenged by or are seeking opportunities anew to consider ministry practices with and to same-gender couples and their families. This resource is for them.

It is important to stress that this guide to conversation is not designed to revisit questions about personal perspectives regarding same-sex relationships, and it is not intended to change peoples' minds on those issues. It does not focus on the ELCA's decision to permit diverse perspectives or practices. There are other resources for those conversations⁴, and the ELCA social statement frames such discussions.

Rather, this four-part series is intended to help people talk about practical ministry questions that can be challenging in certain contexts. It assumes the diversity of perspectives present in many congregations and is designed to help individuals talk together about how they will live out faithful mission and ministry in the world. It is a resource for the many congregations that exist both with a range of perspectives and with growing numbers of same-gender couples and their families in its pews. It is a resource for congregations that want to ask: How can conversations lead us into doing ministry that is life-giving for all? That is the invitation of this resource.



³ More information about and links to the resources each provides can be found in Appendix 1.

⁴ [Journey Together Faithfully, ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Part Two; Background Essay on Biblical Texts for Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality](#). (Chicago: ELCA, September 2003); [Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Social Statement](#).

INTRODUCTION

The beloved hymn, “The Church of Christ, in Every Age,” speaks to the reality and challenges God’s church encounters. How does the ELCA proclaim the gospel and serve our world that is “beset by change?” The church has and continues to endure changes and challenges in the 21st century as it has in previous centuries. This session is a guide to help participants think about how their congregation deals with change and challenges.

FACING CHANGE IS NOT NEW

The year 2017 reminds us of the Reformation’s 500th anniversary and how dramatic were the changes of the 16th-century Reformation. Lutheran reformers preached that salvation – being made right before God as sinners – was a gift of God’s grace. It could not be earned or merited by human deeds or understanding. They also insisted that the living Word, not the church hierarchy, was God’s ultimate authority.

As the lead reformer, Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible and the liturgy into the common German language helped bring God’s Word to all people. His hymn compositions, theological texts, and the writing of the Small and Large Catechisms also helped lay a new groundwork for every believer’s ministry in daily life. Scholars agree that Luther and other reformers like John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli planted seeds for democracy and citizen engagement in public life. In short, the reformers’ ministry changed the church and the course of history.

The ELCA continues to proclaim the gospel to a needy world and encounter new challenges and opportunities. The sessions in this resource are crafted to help congregations have a conversation around one of today’s vital issues, the practical questions faced by many congregations about how to carry out ministry with and to same-gender couples and their families. As with every change God’s church has faced through the ages, such practical questions present both challenge and opportunity. As with every change God has promised the Holy Spirit as a guide for those who wish to discern together. *“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”* (Romans 12:2).

Parish conversation as a response to challenges and opportunities in the church is not new! The Acts of the Apostles describes the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ and the missionary journeys of Peter and Paul (Acts 15:1-31). Faithful Jews comprised the core of Jesus’ earliest followers, but when gentiles (non-Jews) were drawn in by the apostles’ evangelism, differences arose. Yes, the very first church experienced conflict and differing perspectives as people struggled with language, leadership, membership rituals and much more. But with the help of the Holy Spirit and the apostles’ leadership, the

Guide leaders

This resource guide encourages the use of a leadership team. If not already arranged, please consider offering to serve or take turns in one of these roles.

Moderator: Good conversation in a group benefits from having someone serve as a neutral moderator. This person simply directs the conversation, helps everyone participate and encourages participants to remain focused on the questions.

Recorder: A second important role is a record keeper. Someone with good listening skills could record key concerns, ideas, agreement and tensions or disagreements on an easel pad, electronically, etc.

Timekeeper: A third volunteer will keep time and help everyone stay on track.

early church discerned God's Word and worked through their differences. Peter identified the grace of God as a common value held by Jews and gentiles and Paul and Barnabas shared God's "signs and wonders" that took place on their evangelical journeys. Critical to this was recognizing they were bound together as one when baptized into Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit. As Peter put it, "And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us" (Acts 15:8-9).

It is in this baptismal unity that we turn to some key questions to discuss at the outset of this conversation series. We are no different than the early church or the 16th-century reformers as we have challenges and opportunities to find new ways to minister together.

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What are the particular ministry gifts that our congregation brings to the community? What makes us proud of our congregation? What makes us proud to be part of the ELCA?
2. What are the difficult issues our congregation is facing or has encountered in the recent past? How have we engaged in making decisions about these things? How did we try to discern God's will?
3. This conversation series focuses on ministry with and to same-gender couples and their families within our congregation. This effort is not about defining a "problem" or converting others to "my view;" rather, it is intended to engage all people in discussing the congregation's life and ministry. What questions come to mind as you think about this purpose?
4. By the conclusion of this four-part conversation series, what do we hope to accomplish?

Context

ELCA congregations are called to discern about their ministry within the framework set by the social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and the related ministry policies. Both were authorized on behalf of the ELCA at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the highest legislative body of our church. Both the statement and current ELCA ministry policies acknowledge as faithful to Lutheran heritage a certain range of convictions regarding the meaning of Scripture and what is responsible ministry with and to those in legal, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. Both the [Introduction](#) to this resource and [Appendix 2](#) provide further explanation.

Forum covenant

- Be in prayer and seek the Spirit's guidance.
- Follow the Golden Rule.
- Speak for yourself and honestly convey your thoughts and feelings.
- Listen to understand. Keep an open mind and heart.
- Disagree respectfully with others' ideas.
- Move toward greater mutual understanding.

INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on confronting ministry challenges and is designed to help you step back and think about how that happens in your setting. Different congregations, congregation councils and parish organizations arrive at conclusions about ministry in different ways. Sometimes this is true even of different task groups within a congregation. Often participants simply reach consensus and take action. In other cases, there need to be public discussion and votes. More complex issues require more time and attention.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

After the 2015 Supreme Court ruling in support of same-sex couples' right to marry, same-gender couple applications for marriage licenses dramatically increased. Some couples approached their faith communities and asked to be married. Some Lutheran congregations already had clear policies or commitments. But many ELCA congregations have a wide range of perspectives within their congregation or have not received the request before. What would it take for a congregation to work through the issue of same-gender marriage and develop a clear path for responding to a request to be married in the church?

In fact, many smaller and quieter concerns (sometimes decisions) also need to be considered in light of these changing family configurations in our society. These may include parents' concerns for gay children in youth groups, the review of catechetical instruction relative to human sexuality, advocating for human rights and safety, who will be Sunday school teachers, expectations for behavior, and many others.

While the ELCA does have constitutional requirements, we do not have a church governance in which a hierarchical structure determines most of a congregation's policies. Though we have bishops who provide oversight, they primarily serve as pastors, administrators and theological educators, who advise and support a more democratic style of making decisions. ELCA congregations depend on the structure of the wider church – clusters, synods and the churchwide ministries – for certain kinds of guidance and for connection to ministries across the state or the globe. However, at the congregational level, the congregation council, committees and pastor work together with congregation members to define parish ministry and policies. Unsurprisingly, the resolution of concerns on small or on substantive issues are made in different ways.

An ongoing discernment

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has discerned and deliberated human sexuality issues for more than 20 years resulting in the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly's approving the "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" social statement. The 2009 assembly also adopted ministry policy resolutions. (See [Appendix 2](#)).

Lutheran congregations have responded to the social statement and policy resolutions and arrived at different conclusions. Two organizations in particular, Lutheran CORE and ReconcilingWorks provide resources that reflect differing convictions that are yet within the context of ELCA ministry policies. Both organizations invite congregations to affiliate and support their missions and both are committed to faithfully working within the ELCA.

RESOURCES FOR HAVING CONVERSATION

Confronting challenges together as a collection of people is easier said than done. Many people have strong views and value individualism and the freedom to express personal opinions – at times in complete disagreement with someone else. Creating a process to both listen to one another’s views and concerns and discern where God is leading is a significant task. In recent years, the ELCA has devoted resources to studying and encouraging several forms to constructively engage congregational differences.

One of those is generally called **communal discernment**. An ELCA task force examined the theology, cultural practices and habits that make for good communal discernment. They determined that the practice of discernment requires reflecting deeply on God’s Word, and through worship, prayer and conversation, finding the Spirit’s work in the congregation’s midst. The task force’s report provides guidance and resources and concludes:⁵

God calls to us work on how we discern where God is leading us. God calls us to wonder, “Can we improve the way we listen to one another, engage issues, and make decisions so that trust is deepened and respect grows, even if we should disagree?” We trust that God is calling us to find ways to improve our communal discernment around difficult issues and our communal deciding as we seek to be faithful in our time. While we will never find perfection in this broken world and in our own brokenness, God will still be leading us toward new and greater life, even when we think we have failed.⁶

Deliberative dialogue is another form of collective thinking that is used in democratic decision-making and useful in the church. Dialogue is different from debate. Debate is adversarial where opposing speakers endeavor to persuade listeners to choose a winner and a loser. Deliberative dialogue instead brings ordinary citizens together to share opinions and concerns and seek some degree of common ground. Deliberation is based on fairness, intellectual integrity and honest humility.

The practical characteristics of communal discernment and deliberative dialogue often overlap but together they provide the opportunity for people to think and make judgments collectively in the most constructive ways. This conversation series encourages using these kinds of collective thinking and communal practices regarding ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families.

Finally, in all forms of confronting differences, three key characteristics about disagreeing well help smooth the way for success. These have been used and identified by ELCA task forces and shared with the ELCA Conference of Bishops.⁷ All of these are consistent with the spirit of humility that the Bible urges upon followers of Christ (Romans 12:3).

⁵ [Report of the Communal Discernment Task Force](#).

⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

⁷ These are distilled from the [Report and Recommendations of Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families Working Group](#) (M2SGF), Appendix I: Reflections on the Theology and Character of Disagreeing Well written by the Rev. Dr. S. John Roth, bishop, Central/Southern Illinois Synod, who served as a member of the working group. He also shared these with the Conference of Bishops as part of the report of the working group.

1. *Fairness.* I am disagreeing well when I can state the position of the person I am disputing with accurately enough that that other person recognizes that position as genuinely his or her position.
2. *Intellectual integrity.* I am disagreeing well when I can state the strongest, most compelling argument against my position. In other words, I can recognize and acknowledge where my own position is most vulnerable and where a contrasting position makes valid points.
3. *Honest humility.* I am disagreeing well when, after thinking through my position and expressing it with true conviction, I acknowledge that as a fallen, flawed human being I may be wrong. This implies that I and another can learn from each other. This third characteristic is essential. And living this third characteristic – to be able to say honestly, “I may be wrong” – doesn’t happen unless I fundamentally entrust my righteousness to Christ, because I am *simul justus et peccator* (a famous term from the Reformation that means being a sinner and made righteous at the same time).

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. How does our congregation incorporate prayer and Scripture when encountering difficult issues?
2. In what ways does our congregation involve its members in discussing important issues?
3. Take a moment to talk about the guidelines for disagreeing well. How does your congregation practice “disagreeing well”? When you think back to the issues listed in session 1, how would you grade your listening skills?
4. In addition to Scripture and prayer, are there other resources – organizations, written material or people – to turn to for help?

Deliberative-dialogue forums normally require two hours to thoroughly engage people in discussing a subject. In this one-hour session we will sample the deliberative process by briefly considering the three options described below. In this exercise, you will examine hypothetical actions and consequences of what could be done. Feel free to add specific steps First Lutheran might take or identify additional drawbacks as you discuss each option. Give equal time to each option, perhaps 10-12 minutes, before concluding with the final step of the dialogue called "making choices."

LISTENING TO PERSONAL CONCERNS

Before discussing the three options for action below, go around the room and share brief, one- or two-sentence personal concerns about why ministry with and to same-sex couples feels real for you or for the congregation. For example, "I care deeply about all the members of our church and I know there are differences." Or, "I have a cousin who is gay, and I know he has been hurt by prejudice."

A HYPOTHETICAL ILLUSTRATION

The following case study is based on a compilation of several actual parish scenarios:

First Lutheran is a vibrant congregation in a Midwestern suburb. Pastor Jim recently marked his 25th ordination anniversary. Pastor Jean is the 30-year-old associate pastor in her first call. They have worked together for three years, and both are well-liked. Ruth and Eileen are members of the congregation. Ruth is an English professor at a local university, and Eileen owns an interior design store. As a couple, they have been First Lutheran members for five years and are quietly open about their relationship. Both have served on committees and are valued as active participants in the life of the congregation and are especially committed to social ministry projects. Ruth was a congregation council member for three years.

First Lutheran held several adult forums and used the resources associated with the development of the ELCA social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust." The congregation used the study materials for raising awareness, but since the social statement and affiliated denominational policies were approved in 2009, the congregation has not discussed these matters, although some members quietly left the congregation. Several congregations in the synod left the ELCA in opposition to the social statement a couple years ago. Some other near-by congregations saw new people attending as a result of the adoption of the policies and social statement.

Just before the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-gender marriage, the state in which the congregation is located passed a law approving marriage licenses for gay and lesbian applicants. Ruth and Eileen have been partners for 15 years. In light of the state and federal legal actions, they decided to apply for a marriage license and subsequently met with pastors Jim and Jean and requested to be married at First Lutheran. Pastor Jim told them that the congregation had not determined its policy on doing same-gender weddings. He said he was reluctant to move forward unless the parish developed and approved a clear policy. He honestly expressed that he was conflicted about the issue, while Pastor Jean said that she was supportive. Both pastors acknowledged that they had not discussed this issue at length with one another.

All three options below are consistent with ELCA teaching and policy as set forth in "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and our church's ministry policy.

OPTION 1: REQUEST HELP FROM ANOTHER ELCA CONGREGATION

In this option, pastors Jim and Jean could refer Ruth and Eileen to pastors in another parish. Like most pastors, they would be reluctant to do so, but pastoral care in God's church does not rest entirely on any one individual or any one congregation. Rather, it flows from its participation in the whole body of Christ.⁸ Pastors demonstrate wisdom when they refer parishioners for counseling or other needs that are beyond their personal expertise. Pastors cannot always be "all things to all people," but Christ's church can.

But this approach has its drawbacks. It would mean that Ruth and Eileen would not be able to celebrate their marriage commitment at their church in familiar surroundings. While they could invite their church friends to their marriage ceremony in another parish, they will not feel the embrace of their faith community. Ruth and Eileen will certainly feel disillusioned and are likely to reconsider their relationship to First Lutheran. And what about the next time someone asks? To refer would mean that the pastors and the congregation would miss this opportunity to discern where the Spirit is leading the congregation.

OPTION 2: SEEK CLARITY FROM THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL

In this option, the pastors and the congregation council would assume responsibility for responding to Ruth and Eileen's request to be married. Lutherans respect that the pastor's office holds authority for agreeing, or not, to conduct a marriage ceremony. (This is true for heterosexual couples as well.) At the same time, the congregation council has primary responsibility for how church facilities are used. Therefore, clear and honest communication among the pastor(s) and church leaders is paramount.

The council could appoint a task force to study the issue and bring a formal recommendation to a future council meeting. The council could make a final decision or recommend a proposal that could be voted upon at a congregational meeting. Either is a standard process for decision-making relative to big issues. But what would all this mean for Ruth and Eileen's relationship with their congregation?

If the discussion were left largely to the council on this potentially controversial issue, it would become the responsibility of a small group of congregation leaders without much participation by the congregation, except for perhaps a final vote. Members may well feel left out of participating in a critical decision-making process. In addressing this issue without more time and effort, the pastors and congregation council members might unintentionally create division among parish members or between members and the congregation's leadership.

OPTION 3: ENGAGE CONGREGATION MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT AND DIALOGUE

This option would provide for a process inviting as many congregation members as possible to meet in small groups for prayer, study and conversation about conducting same-gender weddings as a congregational policy. Groups would use a discussion guide and seek areas of agreement or common ground. While Ruth and Eileen's request to be married would be the stimulus for the study process, parish members would be asked to articulate their concerns about the issue and make recommendations to the congregation council.

⁸ The practice of referral was recommended by the Working Group on Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families "when personal convictions and ministry needs are dissimilar (including the possible referral to full communion partners)." See Recommendation 2 for more.

But this would take some time. While the process would be deliberate, Ruth and Eileen might have to delay their wedding. What would be the impact on them? They might subsequently feel uneasy about being the subject of the congregation's process and experience stress in their relationship. Another drawback might be that the parish might find it difficult to convene an adequate number of participants and/or not have enough people comfortable facilitating the small group discussions.

REFLECTION ON MAKING CHOICES

1. The three options are framed to address First Lutheran's situation: Request help from another ELCA congregation, seek clarity from the congregation council, or engage congregation members in discernment and dialogue. If you were a First Lutheran member, which of these would you prefer? Why?
2. What are some of the tensions between what could be done in each case and the potential consequences?
3. What other options for good decision-making could you envision?
4. How would you advise First Lutheran to proceed? What would be reasonable next steps?



SESSION 4: HOW WILL OUR CONGREGATION SHAPE ITS MINISTRY?

DEVOTION

Hymn: Lord, Speak to Us, That We May Speak (ELW 676)

Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let us seek
your straying children, lost and lone.

Oh, lead us, Lord, that we may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet;
oh, feed us, Lord, that we may feed
your hungering ones with manna sweet.

Oh, teach us, Lord, that we may teach
the precious truths which you impart;
and wing our words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

Oh, fill us with your fullness, Lord,
until our very hearts o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show.

Scripture

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:4-5)

Prayer

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive, intellect to understand you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benedict, 480-543

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final session is to arrive at common ground and subsequently lead to doing ministry together that is life-giving for all. In the previous sessions, we acknowledged that the church continues to be "beset by change." We explored what it means to disagree well and practiced an abbreviated deliberation using a case illustration. This session offers the opportunity to choose a specific concern or issue in your own context and provides questions to help prompt the conversation. If feasible for your group, the goal is to come to or be close to actual suggestions that can be shared in the context of your congregation's life.



TAKE TIME TO DISCUSS PURPOSE AND VALUES

While it may already be obvious to many, it is important first to be clear about what specific concern or concerns call for discernment and dialogue. Perhaps a same-gender couple has asked your pastor to conduct a wedding. Perhaps parents have expressed hesitations about a gay person teaching in Christian education class. Perhaps parents of gay children are experiencing subtle discrimination in a youth group. Perhaps people of different sexual orientations wish to talk with one another about the overall direction of the congregation's life and ministry. Different reasons may prompt these discussions and it's important for the group to be clear.

Meaningful dialogue takes place only when people share something of their deeply held values as they talk together about ministry practices. It can be challenging, but in the spirit of non-adversarial dialogue, a critical task is to take the time to listen carefully as others explain their values. This leads to greater understanding even though differences may remain.

It's especially helpful to recognize that most people tend to favor certain clusters of values over others. For example, some lean toward values for openness like change, tolerance and creativity. Others lean toward the values of tradition like continuity, obedience and discipline. All of these, either individually or as clusters, can be found in Scripture and are important in the Christian life. It usually is a matter that values are held with different priorities, and when we each understand that, it is easier to understand each other.

Talking about values can help us establish common ground too. We may discover values we have in common or that fairness is a value most everyone shares and, therefore, can be used to move forward as a community. This is why it is important to listen carefully to what others value and discern what values make for common ground. The challenge is to talk about the issues while letting everyone's values assist the discussion.

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

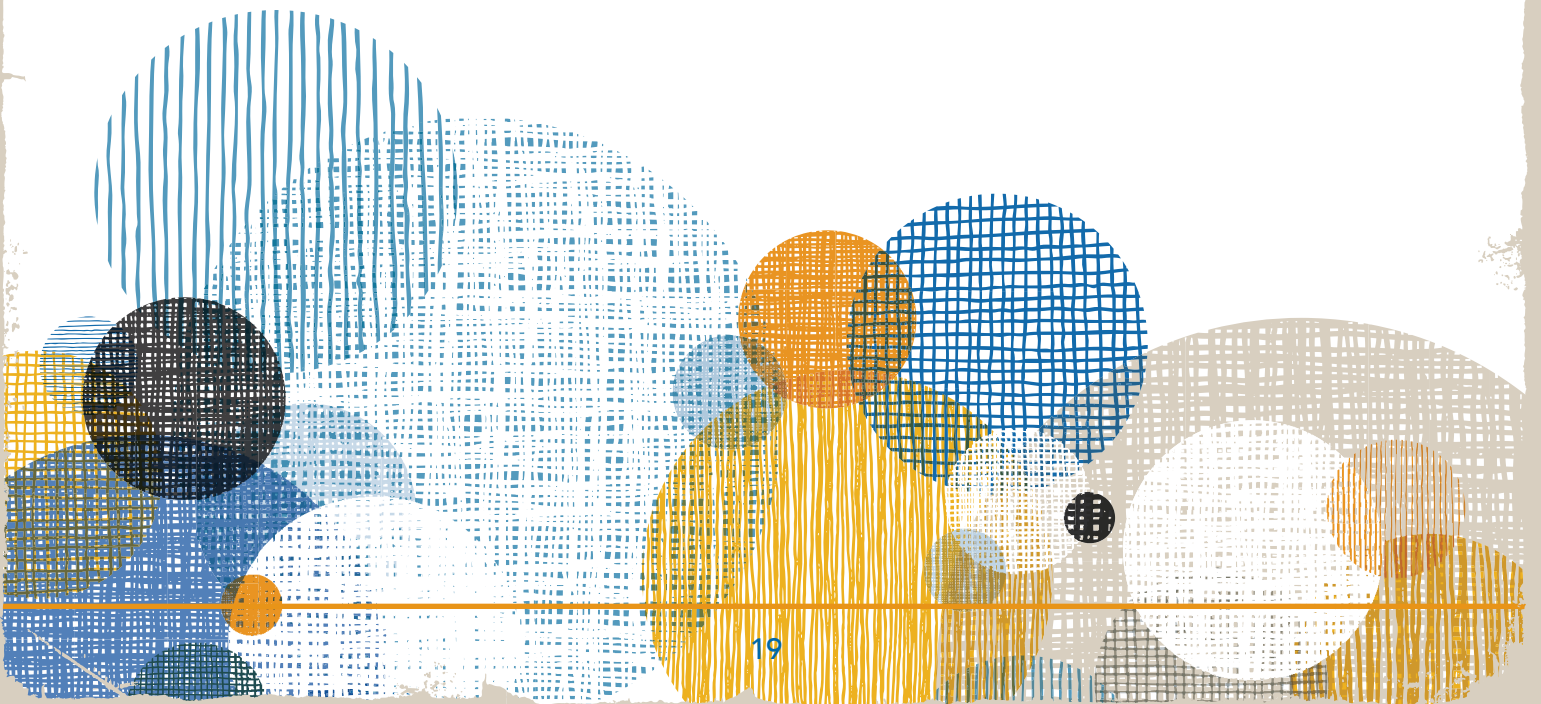
1. What values do each of us lean toward as we come to the dialogue about doing ministry together that is life-giving for all?
2. What are the particular challenges and opportunities our congregation has around the issue of LGBTQ people in our community?
3. How do you think same-gender couples and their families feel about their place in the life and ministry of this congregation?
4. What options are available for establishing more welcoming ministry practices to and with same-sex couples and their families?
5. What are the tensions in our congregation related to establishing some of these?
6. Same-gender marriage is now legal in the United States. How would our congregation handle a same-gender couple's request to be married?

7. What specific recommendations regarding ministry could we agree to as a group that has talked together? How could we refer these to others in our congregation?

CONVERSATION SERIES REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This final section of the conversation series seeks to summarize the dialogue. Now that you have participated in this conversation series:

1. Are you thinking differently about ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families? Please explain.
2. Did you learn anything new from others? Please explain.
3. Are there particular steps you would advise the congregation's leaders to take? What are the potential consequences?
4. What's next? Where do we go from here?



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF RESOURCES

ELCA DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

1. [“Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” social statement](#)
2. Ministry Policy Resolutions adopted in 2009 (These resolutions can be found in [Report and Recommendations of the Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families Working Group](#), in Appendix A)
3. [Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA](#)
4. Articles in the [Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#)
5. [Journey Together Faithfully, ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Part Two](#)
6. [Background Essay on Biblical Texts for Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality](#)
7. [Supplemental Resources for use within the Evangelical Lutheran Worship Service of Marriage](#)

RESOURCES FROM OTHERS

The following links are provided as an aid for those who wish to learn more about these organizations and the resources they provide. Inclusion on this list does not imply ELCA endorsement of all the resources that have or may be offered by these organizations. It is possible that some resources fall outside the range of ELCA practice when evaluated according to “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” or other ELCA policy documents.

- [Lutheran CORE](#)
 - [Marriage & Family Resources](#)
- [ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation](#)
 - [Building an Inclusive Church](#)
- Full communion partners resources: [Report and Recommendations of the Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families Working Group](#), in Appendix J-2, J-3

APPENDIX 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT⁹

INTRODUCTION

The 13th Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), meeting in August of 2013, responded to formal requests from synods for conversation and resource sharing related to ministry in light of changing family configurations. Acting upon the assembly's direction, the ELCA Church Council at its November 2013 meeting authorized the formation of a working group to bring a report and recommendation regarding ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families. This guide to conversation responds to one of the recommendations of that working group. However, these actions did not appear suddenly. They occurred in a context of social change and ELCA-wide discernment from the earliest days of the ELCA, which was formed in 1987. This brief overview of historical context is important in itself and may be useful as background for the conversations this resource hopes to facilitate.

CALLS FOR CHANGE

It is quite clear that during the last several decades many people in our culture and within the church began to experience and rethink the situation of those in same-sex relationships who seek lifelong companionship and commitment and sincerely desire the support of other Christians for living faithfully in all aspects of their lives. (See "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," p. 18) From as early as the late 1960s, medical research about human psychology and biology, among other factors, began to challenge assumptions about the origin of same-sex orientation and to challenge long-held social customs, law and policy. These challenges to long-held beliefs regarding same-sex couples led many in our church to consider again the meaning and application of Scripture as well as the Lutheran theological heritage. The ELCA conversation, like that in society, was extended and often hotly contested. While old certainties diminished and an old consensus deteriorated, it did not resolve differing and deeply held convictions. A new consensus within our church has not emerged.

'HUMAN SEXUALITY: GIFT AND TRUST'

In this context, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," adopted in 2009, drew on a foundational Lutheran understanding of ethics. That understanding held that in the common purpose to love the neighbor, Christian freedom may permit a certain diversity of conscience-bound practices. The statement did not recognize all possible convictions or practices as faithful but established a range because "in this discernment about ethics and church practice, faithful people can and will come to different conclusions about the meaning of Scripture and about what constitutes responsible action" (p. 19). Further, it taught that our church as a matter of respect for the consciences of others "will include these different understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world" (p. 19).

⁹ This appendix is adapted with necessary revisions from the "Report and Recommendations of Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families Working Group," p. 2f. The report was received by the ELCA Church Council in November 2015 and referred to the churchwide organization for implementation (CC15.11.41).

NEW MINISTRY POLICY RESOLUTIONS

While the social statement did not require change in ELCA ministry policy, the 2009 Churchwide Assembly also adopted four ministry policy resolutions (available in the [Report and Recommendations of Ministry to and with Same-Gender Couples and Their Families Working Group](#) (M2SGF), Appendix A that created “structured flexibility” for ordination and for the conduct of marriage ceremonies for gays and lesbians. It did so by adopting four resolutions that later were articulated in [Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA](#). Resolution 1 affirmed that the ELCA would strive to be a church that bore the burden of respecting others whose consciences and practices differed within the range of convictions set by the social statement. Resolution 2 made it possible for “*congregations that choose to do so*” [italics added] to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” Resolution 3 and Resolution 4 directed the ELCA to “*find a way for those in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church*” [italics added]. These directives for ministry policy allowed structured flexibility in decision-making regarding approving or disapproving candidacy and call for those who are otherwise qualified.

THE ELCA CONTEXT

Multiple consequences from these two sets of Churchwide Assembly decisions flowed in mixed and ever-changing measures for the life of the ELCA. There was, and continues to be, joy, relief, sorrow, pain and anger within our church. There has been splintering and recommitment. There has been a loss of membership and financial support, and yet, for some, a renewal of confidence. There has been criticism and yet also affirmation for the changes made. Leaders and members often have been exhausted and/or enlivened by the opportunities and challenges. Some have mourned and others have sensed resurgence in the ELCA’s mission and ministry. These multiple and mixed consequences remain as this guide is prepared.

While many observations could be made about the ELCA experience since 2009, four in particular are relevant for this guide.

1. The ELCA in its documents remains deeply committed to ministry with all children of God.
2. The ELCA is learning what an extraordinary challenge it is to live into being a church that recognizes and honors a range of varied, diverse, even at times contradictory, understandings and practices. These challenges and opportunities continue to call forth the confident and daring faith Martin Luther described, a faith empowered by God to trust the Spirit to see us through as conversations continue.
3. In holding together both the responsibility and the challenge, it has become clear that the ELCA as a whole in 2009 was not fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities brought by the adoption of “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” and the ministry policy resolutions. In particular, we had not given full thought or consideration for what pastoral ministry to and with same-gender couples would look like across conviction sets in the ELCA.
4. These challenges and opportunities became all the more real for many congregations after the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that “the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the Due Process Clause and Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.”¹⁰

¹⁰ SCOTUS: Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015.