



An Updated Frequently Asked Questions on the Two Reconsiderations of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

Background

What is Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust?

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust is a social statement of the ELCA that was adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly by a 2/3 vote of assembly members. A social statement is a teaching and policy document that provides broad frameworks to assist in thinking about important social issues in the context of faith and life.

Why are elements of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust being reconsidered?

The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized two reconsiderations (Memorial C3 and Motion K) of the social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (www.elca.org/socialstatements), both by two-thirds majorities. The assembly did not authorize a reconsideration of the whole statement or dictate a particular outcome. Both possible reconsiderations arise from legal and social changes since the adoption of *Human Sexuality* in 2009.

What is the first reconsideration?

The focus of Reconsideration #1 is editorial, which means the task force will look at small, clarifying word changes only. As the authorization indicates, civil law governing same-sex marriages, public acceptance of such marriages, and diversity of family configurations have changed dramatically since 2009. The most obvious example is the 2015 Supreme Court decision that makes the marriage of any two individuals the law of the land. Given the legal and social changes since adoption of *Human Sexuality*, the task force will examine editorial questions such as whether the statement should use ‘marriage’ for all couples.

What is the second reconsideration?

The focus of Reconsideration #2 is substantive rather than editorial, examining the coexistence in the 2009 statement of four different but valid convictions that Lutherans can faithfully hold about same-gender relationships (the shorthand for this concept is “bound conscience”). Again, the authorization sets in motion a reconsideration of these ideas but does not determine the outcome. The outcome must align with the main arguments of the 2009 statement and the process of reconsideration will follow standard ELCA procedure for churchwide discernment.

Where Are We Now?

What is happening in the process now?

The task force has completed a set of draft edits for Reconsideration #1. These are posted online for feedback. People across the ELCA have until January 31, 2025, to provide comments and feedback to the task force.

How can I provide feedback?

Throughout the public comment period, an online survey will be available at www.elca.org/reconsiderations. This is the best way to provide feedback. You can also download and mail a paper survey, or send an email to the task force.

Mail: Human Sexuality Task Force
ELCA
Office of the Presiding Bishop
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631

Email feedback or questions to the task force at Reconsiderations@elca.org.

Discussing the draft edits as a group or as part of an educational session in your worshipping community is a great way to gather feedback. A guide for conversations is available at www.elca.org/reconsiderations.

Are the edits posted online the final edits? It looks like the work is already done!

No! The draft edits are not final and are not being proposed for Church Council consideration yet. This is a process, and your feedback is important.

Process and Protocol

What is “reconsideration”?

Reconsideration is the technical term for the process by which the ELCA can think again about specific elements in a social statement. Reconsideration is not a wholesale rejection of a previous social statement. Instead, this process allows the church to thoughtfully, prayerfully, and communally re-examine particular parts of a social teaching document.

What is the protocol for the reconsiderations?

ELCA social teaching and its development are governed by “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns,” available at download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Policies_and_Procedures.pdf. The process for reconsideration begins with the selection of a task force and will follow the designated procedure through two cycles. Each cycle will end with possible proposals for a churchwide assembly to consider. The work is directed by Theological Ethics staff in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. Because all social statements are adopted by two-thirds vote, any changes also require two-thirds vote by a churchwide assembly. The entire social statement is not being reconsidered, only those sections specified by the action of the 2022 assembly.

What are the steps in each reconsideration cycle?

There are five designated steps and a possible sixth. One task force will address both reconsiderations, one after the other.

- 1) In 2024 the ELCA Church Council appointed a single task force of 16 individuals chosen through a public application/nomination process. (Applications became available in late October 2023.) Task forces are composed of ELCA members intentionally chosen for the diversity of their viewpoints, gender, race/ethnicity, geography, age and other factors.

- 2) The task force will receive presentations by specialists and engage in study and conversation to probe the questions at hand.
- 3) For each reconsideration, the task force is required to provide a draft for public comment on any proposed wording changes and include a survey to collect public feedback.
- 4) Task force members review all public input, such as emails or survey responses to the draft, and then send a proposal to the ELCA Church Council.
- 5) The Church Council takes action on any proposal and forwards their recommended action to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly (Reconsideration #1) and to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly (Reconsideration #2) for action (two-thirds vote required).
- 6) A reconsideration cycle may include hearings, longer periods of discernment, or development of study resources if the task force considers any of these wise.

Will the task force gather comments and perspectives from across the church?

Yes! Members of the task force will review all emails and letters received and, as noted in step 3 above, there is a specific, extended public comment period based on a draft for each process.

Why will the process take so long?

ELCA protocol for reconsideration requires a period of approximately two years in order to permit ELCA-wide discernment that makes room for feedback from anyone who chooses to participate. Since there are two reconsiderations, the extended time is necessary to provide for the thorough study and churchwide discussion described above. In addition, the work of this task force for reconsideration begins while an existing task force is already developing a social statement on civic life and faith for consideration by Churchwide Assembly 2025.

The Task Force

Does the task force represent a diversity of views?

Yes, task force members represent a wide diversity of backgrounds, contexts, and perspectives. The representation on the task force follows ELCA standards for representation. While some task force members may choose to share information about themselves through their online bios, the ELCA will not share non-public information about the task force members to protect their confidentiality.

How can I share my concerns, questions, suggestions, or perspective with the task force?

During the public comment period, you can share your thoughts on your own or through an online survey. At any time during the process you can also email Reconsiderations@elca.org. Unfortunately, due to the volume of emails, not all messages will receive a detailed response, but messages will be shared with members of the task force.

How will the task force share information with the church?

Updates about the task force's work will be posted to www.elca.org/reconsiderations. In addition, the task force will regularly report to the ELCA Church Council. Announcements about public comment periods and other opportunities will be shared via standard forms of ELCA communication, such as social media posts and news releases.

What This Means...and What It Doesn't

Does the 2009 statement still govern the official stance and practice of the ELCA?

Yes, the 2009 social statement still governs the official stance and practice of the ELCA.

Will the task force be reconsidering the whole 2009 social statement?

The 2022 Churchwide Assembly did not authorize a reconsideration of the whole social statement or dictate a particular outcome. The outcome must align with the main themes of the 2009 statement and the process of reconsideration will follow standard ELCA procedure for churchwide discernment.

Addendum: 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Actions

Wording of Reconsideration #1 -- editorial (Memorial C3)

To authorize a social statement reconsideration to revise *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) so that its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples in accordance with "Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns" (2018). While references would be reviewed throughout the whole statement, the following sections are designated for reconsideration as described here: [reference may be found at www.elca.org/socialstatements]

- "Marriage: shelter and context for trust" p. 15. This would not reconsider the idea of marriage as shelter and context for trust but would consider the import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals;
- "Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships" p. 18f. Revision here would not change this church's current understanding that recognizes four identified positions of bound conscience within its life. p. 19, but would review wording about "publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same-sex relationships" in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples;
- "Loving families: ground and source for social trust" p. 21f. Review here would consider references to diversity of family configurations; and

To authorize the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Church Council to approve the parameters and expense budget of this process and identify the revenue source(s) to provide for this revision to be considered as early as the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Wording of Reconsideration #2 – substantive (Motion K)

To authorize a possible revision of the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* which reconsiders the church's current concept of the four positions of bound conscience. This revision would focus on pages 19-21 ("lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships") and any other references to the four positions of bound conscience.