

Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*

Background and Executive Summary

The ELCA addresses social concerns in many ways, among them developing and enacting official documents that articulate this church's social teaching and policy. These documents include social statements, social messages, and social policy resolutions that both express and inform the ELCA's moral discernment, teaching, and public witness. They are developed through extensive, inclusive, and accepted processes of deliberation across this church.

These documents and processes are part of a living tradition, open to ongoing dialogue and discernment. For this reason, the ELCA has developed formal procedures for reconsideration of social teaching documents that allow for potential editing, revising, or archiving when necessary. These procedures are described in "[Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns](#)."

Background

The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted "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)" (CA22.01.07). This action authorized reconsideration for potential editing of three specific sections of the social statement. Consistent with the procedure for a reconsideration to edit, the action did not authorize reconsideration of the substantive meaning of the sections. Separately, the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to authorize a substantive reconsideration of pages 19-21 of the original social statement (CA22.03.23).

The executive committee of the ELCA Church Council seated the ELCA Reconsiderations Task Force in 2024 and directed the task force to handle, first, a reconsideration for possible edits and, second, a reconsideration for possible substantive revision. The Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement represents work on the first reconsideration, for possible edits. This decision balanced the desire for reconsideration work to begin with the capacity of the church for ELCA-wide discernment, given the simultaneous work on other important matters, such as the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, consideration of a social statement on faith and civic life, and development of social messages.

After meeting in person in 2024 and 2025, posting the draft edits, considering feedback from the public comment period (October 2024–January 2025), and engaging in prayerful discernment, the task force reached consensus on a Proposed Edited Social Statement. This proposed text was then reviewed by the ELCA Conference of Bishops and ELCA Church Council, and minor corrections were made to the text. The ELCA Church Council received the proposed text and voted to recommend it to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

This Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement is now publicly available through the ELCA website. The 2025 Churchwide Assembly will take action on this text in July-August 2025, after which the task force will begin work on the second reconsideration. Before then, ELCA synods may take action at their own assemblies by sending memorials to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in response to the recommended, proposed text.

Executive Summary

The edits recommended in this document represent the discernment of the ELCA in reconsidering three specific sections of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. Consistent with the 2022 Churchwide Assembly's authorization for reconsideration, these recommended, proposed edits are not intended to change the substantive meaning of the sections. Rather they respond to the assembly's authorization to update or clarify wording from the original social statement in light of:

- “The import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals.”
- “Public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples.”
- “[The] diversity of family configurations” (CA22.01.07).

These phrases from the authorization point to broad categories of edits found within the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement. The paragraphs below offer some examples of these categories.

In several places in the text, language from the original social statement was edited for consistency with the ELCA constitution and more recent social teachings, especially the social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019). For example, in line 291, a reference to “sexual orientation and gender identity” was replaced with the phrase “sex, gender, and sexuality,” which is consistent with the meaning of the original text and with language adopted in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*. This category of edits updates wording to reflect “current church understanding” as named by the assembly when it authorized the reconsideration.

One category of edits involved updating language to reflect recognition of legal marriage between individuals of the same gender in the United States. For example, in several sentences describing marriage, gendered language (“husband and wife”) was replaced with nongendered language such as “marriage for both spouses” (line 105) or “the couple” (line 118). In addition, the heading in line 123 was changed to “Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Marriage” to reflect the legality of marriages between individuals today.

Some of the text in the original social statement was moved within the sections for clarity. For example, a paragraph on “the historic Christian tradition” was moved to lines 151-154 in the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement. This places the paragraph in a more logical spot within the section.

Some edits reflect attention to the diversity of families. For example, in lines 65-66, the term “crucial” was deleted when describing the role of physical lovemaking in marriage. This edit reflected attention to married couples for whom physical lovemaking is not possible or not desired. Similarly, conditional language was added to descriptions of procreation. This reflects awareness that not all married couples anticipate or desire children (for example, see lines 113-115).

Some sentences or phrases were edited to reflect current language about sex, gender, sexuality, and marriage. For example, in line 130, the original social statement named “many of our sisters and brothers in same-gender relationships.” Consistent with current language, this was changed to “We in the ELCA recognize that many of our siblings of diverse sexual orientations in relationships.” This does not change the substantive meaning of the passage but reflects current language used in the ELCA constitution.

The task force also recognizes in humility that all language is continually evolving, especially language about human sexuality and relationships. The proposed edits are intended to reflect language that is current and consistent with language used within the ELCA at the time of writing.

The section of the social statement that describes four convictions of conscience regarding same-gender sexual behavior and relationships (lines 169-198) was intentionally left unedited. Discernment of the public feedback on draft edits to this section led the task force to this decision. This section is the focus of the second reconsideration authorized by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.