

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

Recommended, Proposed Edits and Explanations

The table below lists the edits contained in the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust. This text was posted online in April 2025 and will be considered for action by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. More information on the reconsiderations process and the authorization for editorial reconsideration can be found at [ELCA.org/reconsiderations](https://elca.org/reconsiderations).

The explanations in the right-hand column are for informational use only and are not part of the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement.

Line Numbers and Proposed Edits	Explanation for the Edit
<p>Lines 32-34</p> <p>Original: “Sexual intimacy, together with promises of fidelity and public accountability, nurtures bonds that allow people to thrive and provides a rich context for the care and support of children.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “Sexual intimacy, together with promises of fidelity and public accountability, is intended to nurture bonds that allow people to thrive. Additionally, marriage can provide a rich context for the care and support of children and dependents.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage and the diversity of family configurations, which may or may not involve having children. This edit proposes adding conditional language recognizing that marriage may not involve having or planning to have children.</p>
<p>Line 35 and accompanying endnotes</p> <p>Original: “Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10: 6–9: ‘But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.’ (Jesus here recalls Genesis 1:27; 2:23–24.) (see Addendum)”</p>	<p>Explanation: This paragraph and the accompanying footnotes were moved to lines 151-153. The new location places the original paragraph in a section that more closely focuses on concepts found in the paragraph. References to Mark 10 and Genesis 1 and 2 were moved to a new endnote, which allows for greater detail about the bible passages without changing the substantive meaning of the paragraph.</p>

<p>Lines 36-41 and endnotes</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “In the United States, individual states determine the legal status and definition of marriage and may not discriminate against marriages between individuals of legal age based on race, sex, gender, or sexuality. Within Christianity, marriage is often understood as a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope between two individuals, authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. Ongoing interpretation of the Scriptures and the Confessions has introduced complex considerations to moral discernment about sex, gender, and sexuality, about which there is not universal agreement.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider edits that reflect “current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples...” In this specific section, the authorization directs consideration “that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals.” The proposed edits in this paragraph reflect these directives.</p>
<p>Lines 43-46</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “As mentioned previously (page 10), this church recognizes that these matters are not central to our salvation, though they are central to the trust, flourishing, and well-being of human relationships. For this reason, they do require our best moral discernment, guided by Scripture, the sciences, and human experience, though this discernment may lead to different conclusions.”</p>	<p>Explanation: This proposed edit references language from an earlier section of the 2009 social statement. The proposed paragraph clarifies the substantive meaning of the subsection and its descriptive role in the social statement.</p>
<p>Lines 56-62</p> <p>Original: “Marriage requires constant care and cultivation. It is intended to protect the creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as one foundation of human community. It is a binding relationship that provides conditions for personal well-being, the nourishing of the partner, and the possibility of procreation and the nurturing of children. It also is intended to be a blessing to the community and the world. Because of promises of fidelity and public accountability, marriage provides a context of love, trust, honesty, and commitment within which a couple can express the profound joy of relationship as well as address the troubles they encounter throughout life.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The proposed edits reflect acknowledgement that not all spouses intend or desire children. The proposed edits also reflect awareness that not all marriages meet the intentions of mutual trust and love. The conditional language added here does not change the substantive meaning of the paragraph.</p>

<p>Proposed Edit: “Marriage requires constant care and cultivation. It is intended to protect the creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as one foundation of human community. Because of the promises of fidelity and public accountability, marriage is intended to provide a context of love, trust, honesty, and commitment, within which a couple can express the profound joy of relationship as well as address the troubles they encounter throughout life. It is a binding relationship that should provide conditions for personal well-being and the flourishing of the partner; it also can provide conditions for the raising and nurturing of children. It is intended to be a blessing to the community and the world.”</p>	
<p>Line 64</p> <p>Original: “Christians believe that marriage is not solely to legitimate physical sexual intimacy...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “Christians believe that marriage is not solely to legitimize physical sexual intimacy...”</p>	<p>Explanation: During reconsideration, edits can be made to clarify without changing the existing text. The proposed change of verb in this sentence was based on requests in public feedback for greater clarity.</p>
<p>Lines 65-66</p> <p>Original: “...the play and delight of physical love are crucial expressions...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “...the play and delight of physical love <u>are expressions</u>...”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage, the diversity of family configurations, and the “import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals.” The proposed edit acknowledges that this relationship may not involve physical expressions of love, either by choice or circumstance.</p>
<p>Line 72</p> <p>Original: “The public promises of marriage between a man and a woman, therefore, also protect the community...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “The public promises of marriage, therefore, also protect the community...”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage and the “import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals.” The proposed edit reflects language consistent with those directives.</p>

<p>Lines 92-93</p> <p>Original: “Divorced individuals are encouraged to avail themselves of pastoral care, to be assured of God’s presence, forgiveness, and healing, and to remain in the communion of the church, recognizing the all-encompassing mercy of God.”</p> <p>Proposed edit: “Individuals experiencing marital distress are encouraged to avail themselves of pastoral care; to be assured of God’s presence, forgiveness, and healing; and to remain in the communion of the church, recognizing the all-encompassing mercy of God.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage. This proposed edit expands the sentence to include spouses experiencing marital distress or separation without changing the substantive meaning of the original text.</p>
<p>Lines 97-101</p> <p>Original: “This church will provide supportive pastoral care to those who are divorced. Further, it believes that those who wish to remarry may gain wisdom from the past and may be assured of the Gospel’s freedom, in the midst of brokenness and forgiveness, to enter into their new responsibilities in joy and hope. This church will tend pastorally to the special concerns of blended families, to children of divorced parents, and to the particular tensions that may accompany family breakdown and transition.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “This church will provide supportive pastoral care to those who are separated or divorced. Further, it believes that those who wish to remarry may gain wisdom from the past and may be assured of the Gospel’s freedom, amid brokenness and forgiveness, to enter into their new responsibilities in joy and hope. This church will tend pastorally to the special concerns of blended families, to children of separated or divorced parents, and to the particular tensions that may accompany family distress and transition.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage. This proposed edit expands without changing the substantive meaning of the text to include spouses and children in families in a wider variety of situations.</p>

<p>Lines 104</p> <p>Original: "...marriage for a husband and wife."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: ...marriage for both spouses...</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage and the "import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals." This proposed edit reflects attention to both directives.</p>
<p>Lines 112-114</p> <p>Original: "The legal contract creates a public arrangement within which a couple may safely and equitably share their assets and resources, arrive at joint decisions, anticipate children, protect and nurture them, and plan for a shared future."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "The legal contract creates a public arrangement within which a couple can safely and equitably share their assets and resources, arrive at joint decisions, and plan for a shared future, and may anticipate, protect, and nurture children."</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage, the diversity of family configurations, and the "import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals," which may or may not involve having children. This proposed edit clarifies the conditional language that was in the original social statement and adds clarifying punctuation.</p>
<p>Lines 117</p> <p>Original: "...God's blessing on a man and a woman..."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: ...God's blessing on the couple...</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings of marriage and the "import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals." This proposed edit reflects attention to both directives.</p>
<p>Line 121</p> <p>Proposed Edit: Deleted paragraph from end of section.</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings and civil law. Much of the original text of this paragraph reflects pre-2015 legal and social understandings of marriage in society and the church. Moreover, the main idea of the paragraph is communicated more clearly and thoroughly in the subsequent subsection.</p>
<p>Lines 122</p> <p>Original: "Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships"</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Marriage"</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to "review wording" in this section "in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples." In addition, the general authorization directs the church to review wording in light of current church understanding. The proposed edit to the section title reflects language from the social statement <i>Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action</i> (2019).</p>

<p>Lines 123-125</p> <p>Original: "...in new ways the need of same-gender-oriented individuals to seek relationships of lifelong companionship and commitment, as well as public accountability and legal support for those commitments."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "...in new ways the need or desire of individuals to seek marriage as a relationship of lifelong companionship and commitment, as well as public accountability and legal support."</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to "review wording" in this section "in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples" and current civil law. In addition, the general authorization directs the church to review wording in light of current church understanding. The proposed edit here reflects updated wording consistent with these directives.</p>
<p>Line 126</p> <p>Original: "...understandings of human sexuality in medicine, social science, and corresponding public policy about same-gender relationships."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "...understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality in medicine, social science, and corresponding public policy."</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to "review wording" in this section "in light of current church understanding. These proposed edits reflect updated wording based on more recent ELCA social teachings.</p>
<p>Line 129</p> <p>Original: "We in the ELCA recognize that many of our sisters and brothers in same-gender relationships..."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "We in the ELCA recognize that many of our siblings of diverse sexual orientations in relationships..."</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understanding. The proposed edits are consistent with language in more recent social teaching and the ELCA constitution.</p>
<p>Lines 133-135</p> <p>Original: "We have come to various conclusions concerning how to regard lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, including whether and how to recognize publicly their lifelong commitments."</p> <p>Proposed Edit: "We have come to various conclusions concerning how to regard marriage of LGBTQ+ couples, including whether and how to recognize publicly those lifelong commitments within the context of this church."</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings. This proposed edit reflects updated language without changing the substantive meaning of the sentence.</p>

<p>Lines 137-139</p> <p>Original: “While Lutherans hold various convictions regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, this church is united on many critical issues. It opposes all forms of verbal or physical harassment and assault based on sexual orientation.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “While Lutherans hold various convictions regarding marriage between individuals of diverse sex, gender, or sexuality, this church is united on many critical issues. It opposes all forms of verbal or physical harassment and assault based on actual or perceived sex, gender, or sexuality.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings. This proposed edit reflects more current language without changing the substantive meaning of the sentence. This edit also reflects legal changes since 2009, as identified in the authorization.</p>
<p>Lines 141-142</p> <p>Original: “...support same-gender couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “...support all couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to “review wording” in this section “in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples” and current civil law. This proposed edit suggests current language that reflects these directives without changing the substantive meaning of the sentence.</p>

<p>Lines 144-149</p> <p>Original: “The ELCA recognizes that it has a pastoral responsibility to all children of God. This includes a pastoral responsibility to those who are same-gender in their orientation and to those who are seeking counsel about their sexual self-understanding. All are encouraged to avail themselves of the means of grace and pastoral care.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “The ELCA recognizes that it has a responsibility to care for all children of God. This includes a responsibility to minister to those with diverse sex, gender, or sexual identities and to those who are seeking counsel about their gender or sexual self-understanding. All are encouraged to avail themselves of the means of grace and pastoral care. This church understands pastoral care to be marked by a gracious affirmation of the value of the individual’s life and by concern for their well-being, regardless of their sex, gender, or sexuality.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to consider current church understandings. The proposed edits in this paragraph reflect updated language consistent with more recent social teachings and clarifying language drawn from other social statements (referenced in accompanying footnote #6.)</p>
<p>Lines 151-154</p> <p>Original: “This church also acknowledges that consensus does not exist concerning how to regard same-gender committed relationships, even after many years of thoughtful, respectful, and faithful study and conversation. We do not have agreement on whether this church should honor these relationships and uplift, shelter, and protect them or on precisely how it is appropriate to do so.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “The historic Christian tradition has recognized marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman, reflected in the language of Genesis 1:27; 2:23-24. However, this church acknowledges that consensus does not exist concerning how to regard marriage for couples of diverse sexual orientations, even after many years of thoughtful, respectful, and faithful study and conversation.”</p>	<p>This proposed edit moves original text from the 2009 social statement from earlier in this section to here. In addition, the proposed edit deletes text that would be redundant in the paragraph given the moved text. This is a clarifying edit that does not change the substantive meaning of the paragraph.</p>

<p>Lines 165-205</p> <p>No proposed edits</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for editorial reconsideration directed the church to consider updated language within this subsection. However, this subsection is the focus of the second, substantive reconsideration that will begin in Fall 2025. The task force, recognizing this and noting the deep concerns shared in feedback, intentionally did not attempt to edit language in this section. Reconsideration of this subsection will begin Fall 2025.</p>
<p>Lines 208-212</p> <p>Original: “In contemporary society, the term ‘family’ includes a variety of forms, more akin to the older term of ‘household,’ exclusively employed by Luther to include immediate family members, relatives, and others.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “In contemporary society, the term ‘family’ denotes a variety of forms, such as married couples, partners, children, extended relatives, and others who may be part of one’s chosen family. This understanding is more akin to the older term of ‘household,’ employed by Luther to include immediate family members, relatives, and others.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to “consider references to diversity of family configurations” in this section. The proposed edit suggests the breadth intended by the term “family” in the original text and in the authorization. The removal of the term “exclusively” reflects a more accurate description of Luther’s use of the term “household,” a correction that is within the parameters of editorial reconsiderations based on current church understanding.</p>
<p>Line 219-220</p> <p>Original: “...dependence upon parents and others...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “...dependence upon parents, caregivers, and others...”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to “consider references to diversity of family configurations,” which often include non-parental caregivers. The proposed edit reflects this directive.</p>
<p>Lines 232-233</p> <p>Original: “As such, society properly both regulates and shelters families through family law...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “As such, society is responsible for both protecting and supporting families through public policy...”</p>	<p>Explanation: This proposed edit offers clarifying language about society’s role in relation to regulating and sheltering families. It also clarifies that public policy affecting families is not limited to family law, an editorial correction that is within the scope of reconsideration and does not alter the substantive meaning of the sentence.</p>

<p>Line 250</p> <p>Original: “Many current social trends in the United States and elsewhere properly raise concerns about the health of families.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “Social trends in the United States and elsewhere properly raise concerns about the health of families.”</p>	<p>This minor edit corrects imprecise language that more accurately reflects awareness of social trends without changing the substantive meaning of the sentence. Such clarifying edits are within the scope of the authorization.</p>
<p>Lines 255-261</p> <p>Original: “In this country and throughout the twentieth century, the legally married, heterosexual ‘nuclear family’ has been supported by strong conventions. The nuclear family is well-structured to foster the development of trust in children and youth. The experience of millions of people and recent social science findings demonstrate its ability to do so. This does not mean, however, that it has always done so effectively. Families can shelter sexism or domestic violence, and, in such situations, the safety of children or others who are harmed is of utmost importance.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “In the latter half of the 20th century, the legally married, heterosexual, nuclear family was supported by strong social conventions. With that strong social support, the nuclear family fosters positive experiences for many people. This does not mean, however, that it has always done so effectively. In fact, families of all kinds can shelter sexism or domestic violence, and in such situations, the safety of children or others who may be harmed is of utmost importance. Moreover, there have always been wide variations in household structure, as stated above, including households with extended family members or non-biologically-related members.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to “consider references to diversity of family configurations” in this section. The proposed edits to this paragraph reflect awareness of the “diversity of family configurations” and recent research into diverse family configurations.</p>

<p>Lines 263-267</p> <p>Original: “In this country and in our congregations, families are formed in many ways. There are natural and adoptive families, foster families, blended families, families with a missing generation, and families where the parents are the same gender. Millions of households in the U.S., and many in our church, are headed by single parents—mostly women—whether widowed, divorced, or never married.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “In this country and in our congregations, families are formed in many ways. Some examples include biologically related and adoptive families, foster families, blended families, families with a missing generation, families without children, and families where the parents are the same sex or gender. Millions of households in the U.S., and many in our church, are headed by single or unmarried parents, whether widowed, divorced, or never married.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization directs the church to “consider references to diversity of family configurations” in this section. The proposed edits reflect this authorization, noting families without children and the diversity of households with single or unmarried parents. In addition, the proposed edit here reflects “current church understanding” and language from more recent social teachings and thus reflects the authorization.</p>
<p>Line 274</p> <p>Original: “...regardless of their family situation.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “...regardless of their family situation or household structure.”</p>	<p>Explanation: This proposed edit reflects the authorization’s directive to “consider references to diversity of family configurations” in this section.</p>
<p>Lines 276-278</p> <p>Original: “It also has the task of addressing and advocating against social and economic trends that counter the development of strong families.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “It also has the task of addressing and advocating against social and economic trends that inhibit the development of strong families.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The proposed edit of the verb from “counter” to “inhibit” is intended to clarify the sentence without changing the substantive meaning of it and so falls within the parameters of reconsideration.</p>

<p>Line 283-284</p> <p>Original: “These practices honor God and, when learned in the context of a loving and committed family, may lead to mature and healthy expressions of sexuality. When trust has been betrayed in such situations, then forgiveness, loving correction, and reconciliation must be attempted.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “When trust has been betrayed in such situations, then forgiveness, loving correction, and reconciliation should be encouraged when appropriate to the specific situation.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider “current church understanding” and “the diversity of family configurations.” The proposed edit reflects current church understanding of the complexity of forgiveness in situations of abuse as described in more recent social teachings. A footnote referring to the ELCA’s social message on “Gender-based Violence,” which discusses forgiveness, is included in the proposed edits.</p>
<p>Lines 286-291</p> <p>Original: “This church acknowledges with regret the way in which the misuse of historical teachings concerning sexuality has harmed individuals, deepened suffering, or torn families apart. This includes actions that abandon or shun people for unwed pregnancy or for a same-gender orientation. Hate crimes and violence against those who are regarded as sexually different sometimes have been perpetrated publicly in the name of Christ. Not only must such behaviors be denounced, but this church must work toward greater understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity.”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “This church acknowledges with regret the way in which the misuse of historical teachings concerning sex, gender, and sexuality has harmed individuals, deepened suffering, or torn families apart. This includes actions that abandon or shun people for unwed pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Hate crimes and violence based on the victim’s actual or perceived sex, gender, or sexuality sometimes are perpetrated in the name of Christ. Not only must such behaviors be denounced, but this church must work toward greater understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality.”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider “current church understanding.” This proposed edit reflects current church understanding and language as found in more recent social teachings (see the ELCA’s social statement <i>Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action</i>, 2019)</p>

<p>Line 305</p> <p>Proposed Edit: endnote added</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider “current church understanding.” This endnote refers to more recent social teachings, including the social statement <i>Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action</i> (2019) and the social message “Gender-based Violence” (2015). These references support without changing the substantive meaning of the text.</p>
<p>Line 309</p> <p>Original: “Society at large must ensure that all who are dependent upon others in the family...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “Society at large must ensure that all who are dependent upon others in the household...”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider in this subsection the diversity of family configurations. The proposed edit is consistent with that authorization and with language used earlier in this subsection.</p>
<p>Line 317</p> <p>Original: “This church commits itself to continued attention to and discernment about changing family configurations...”</p> <p>Proposed Edit: “This church commits itself to continued attention to and discernment about diverse family configurations...”</p>	<p>Explanation: The authorization for reconsideration directs the church to consider in this subsection the diversity of family configurations. This proposed edit is consistent with this authorization and further clarifies the substantive meaning of the sentence.</p>