

Gender and Sexuality Coalition 2016 Statement

Summary

Intro / Foundations

As a coalition for Gender and Sexual Justice in our church, the ELCA, we are calling for justice in the regulating of socially acceptable intimate relationalities. We are ELCA Lutherans, ordained and lay leaders, rostered and unrostered, seminarians and theologians, in candidacy and outside of candidacy, participating in the life of the church and leading the people of God in our journey following Jesus. We take seriously the Word of God as revealed in the scriptures and the traditions of the church in living out the Christian faith in various cultural contexts.

The plethora of stories we hear in our conversations demonstrate that life and liberty are being oppressed in the pressure for church leaders to be in marital relationships, or otherwise abstain from all sexual intimacy. The common good of both parishioners and church leaders would benefit from the freedom to be in a variety of healthy relationships, and to hold each other mutually accountable to ensuring that these relationships are life-giving for all involved, including the larger communities.

“An important way that Christians carry out their citizenship is through participation in voluntary associations and movements, both religious and secular. At times, these groups may serve a prophetic function as they protest particular evils, question unexamined assumptions, challenge unjust or immoral practices, and organize for structural changes in the work place, local community, and wider world.” (*Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* 5)

Abbreviations:

CS	Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective
DGD	Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline
HS	Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust
V&E	Vision and Expectations for Ordained Ministers

ELCA Documents and Problematic Sexuality in the Church

- These documents have created with their language a pressure to get married in our community, and to additionally conform to oppressive relational and sexual standards set by our church that are often in contrast with our values and lived experience.
- The expectations surrounding “chastity” purport an ethic of works-based righteousness, positing that certain practices of our sexuality make us a better steward of our pastoral call.
- Singlehood and non-sexual relationships are undervalued by the overemphasis on marriage and family.

- The recent inclusion of same-gender relationships in these documents still utilizes heteronormative language that sets narrow expectations of what an acceptable committed relationship looks like, still excluding many forms of relationality that do not fit within this context.
- V&E and DGD have created a culture of shame in our community, one that manifests itself in both our experience with candidacy committees and among our cohorts. This culture sits in juxtaposition to our current context, politically, financially, scientifically, and technologically.

Relationality and Sexual Ethic

- We as Lutherans believe in an incarnational God, whose presence sanctifies flesh and allows us to see sexuality as a “gift and trust,” not a sinful curse we need to control.
- Theological and ethical arguments that prioritize purity and chastity are in contradiction with our incarnational and baptismal theology.
- Defining “bad” sex should not be done using theologies of purity. Assessments of good or bad Christian relationality should not be evaluated based on presence of sexuality, but on healthy power dynamics.
- There should be no blanket “pastor model” of cultural expectations, but instead contextual ministry - different people with different relational theologies can be called to serve certain communities.
- We maintain a healthy respect for marriage, but see it as one form of relationality. and not the default setting every relationship is pressured to conform to.

What We Want / Conclusion

- We call for an expanded theology/ethic/understanding of Christian relationality and sexuality within our church. This includes:
 - No longer privileging marriage as the only acceptable form of relationality.
 - Updating the document to reflect marriage equality in the United States.
 - Editing for heteronormativity and sexual oppression.
- We want the following church documents to be changed based on this expanded view; V&E, D&G, and HS.
- In a similar form to our ELCA procedure around social statements, we want a moral deliberation and discernment process where V&E and D&G are evaluated. This will involve the formulation of a group whose purpose will be to edit the above listed documents.
- In the spirit of CS pg. 6, which calls for deliberation in the church to include “those who feel and suffer with the issue; those whose interests or security are at stake,” we want individuals in our coalition to be participants in this group as representatives of seminarians who reflect this relational theology.

We raise these issues in love and Christian kinship.

semper reformanda,

The Gender and Sexual Justice Coalition