



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

First Draft of a Proposed ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality

For wide distribution and review in this church

April 15, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Created in the image of God, held by the saving grace of Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, and ever-praying that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are in a process of developing a Social Statement on Human Sexuality. This document is the "First Draft of a Proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality."

According to ELCIC policy, "a Social Statement is a theological and ethical document that provides a foundation for understanding God's living word in the light of the changing realities of the modern world. A Social Statement seeks to provide the social analysis and theological basis for the collective ELCIC understanding of a continuing crucial issue that arises out of the mission of the ELCIC."¹

A social statement is a guiding document, not a policy document. That is, a social statement does not make new policy, but rather is used to help guide discussion and decision-making when issues arise. The intent of developing a social statement is not to conclude discussion on difficult social issues, but rather to help individuals, local congregations and the larger church community to engage in faithful reflection and ministry in the midst of the ongoing challenges of complex and difficult matters. For example, the document might be used in confirmation class as one step in learning how to apply faith to decision making; or, a local congregation, seeking to understand how human trafficking affects their neighbourhood, might review the social statement for additional insight; or, a congregational council might review the document to encourage conversation about mission in their community.

The Human Sexuality Task Force was appointed by the ELCIC National Church Council to lead the process of developing a social statement on human sexuality. In 2008, delegates to Synod conventions were surveyed regarding the importance of particular issues surrounding sexuality. In October, 2009, the ELCIC distributed a Study of Human Sexuality in order to stimulate discussion across this church, and invited input into what might go into a social statement. The Task Force received more than 500 submissions of feedback. After reviewing all the feedback, and with continued prayerful deliberation, the Task Force has prepared this "First Draft of a Proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality" based on feedback received. The process for developing a social statement in the ELCIC includes distributing the first draft widely across this church for consideration, review and feedback.

Feedback from this first draft will be used to make revisions. The revised document will be submitted to National Church Council in March, 2011. To complete this process, the National Church Council needs to authorize a proposed social statement for distribution to delegates to convention. Such a proposal does not become a social statement until it is endorsed by delegates at an ELCIC National Convention.

This draft social statement has three sections. First, "Encountering the World in Which We Live" identifies some of the current issues of sexuality that face our world. These realities are named without judgement. Second, "Facing God and Being Church" seeks to find common language to

¹ The ELCIC's policy on addressing social issues is called: *The Public Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: A Policy on How the Church Addresses Social Issues*. It was adopted by National Church Council in April, 1991. www.elcic.ca



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

articulate the faith and theology which guide our life together. Finally, “Doing Ministry” seeks to stimulate and inform conversation about mission and ministry at the local and global level in matters relating to human sexuality.

Feedback and responses to this first draft should be submitted to:

ONLINE: The feedback form is available online from the following website:
www.elcic.ca/Human-Sexuality/default.cfm
(You may also access this link at www.elcic.ca, click on “Resources” and scroll down to “Human Sexuality.”)

EMAIL: humansexuality@elcic.ca

MAIL: ELCIC Task Force on Human Sexuality
302-393 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg MB R3B 3H6

All feedback from this study should be forwarded by August 31, 2010.



Encountering the World in Which We Live

*"The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."*²

GOD'S WORLD

We live in God's world. We live in a good world. We live in a broken and hurting world. We live in a world made holy by the work of Jesus Christ.

SEXUALITY IN THE WORLD

We live in a world where sexuality is an important aspect of life. Through sexuality, the species of this world reproduce, fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply.³ Human sexuality is a complex, mysterious, wonderful, tempting, vital and holy dimension of personal and societal existence. Sexuality is a significant and personal aspect of identity, affecting our capacity to love and be loved. Sexuality includes the quest for, and the sharing of, companionship. Sexuality affects how we live and relate in family and in community. In local community and neighbourhood, developing an understanding of sexuality helps to develop healthy interpersonal relationships and to build healthy community. Sexuality is a significant dimension of art, culture, social and power dynamics.

OUR SEXUALIZED CULTURE

We live in a culture that often seems obsessed with sex. Sexual imagery and themes abound in art, entertainment, scientific study, advertising, and pornography and are available through various forms of media. With the rapid development of technology, there is an increase in abundance, access and technical sophistication of these images. This also provides greater choices for individuals. As consumers of information, we have more control over the sources we access.

We live in a world where technology changes quickly. With new technology comes new power to do good and bad. Media technologies can be used to support relationships, to share news, to sell products and services, to influence opinion, to play, to learn, to portray the darkest aspects of human nature, to celebrate joyful occasions. For example, the increasing use of cellphones has led to the phenomenon of "sexting." This term "refers to the act of sending, receiving or forwarding nude photos or sexually suggestive messages via cellphone."⁴ As young people grow up with these technological changes, this becomes a new aspect of dating and sexual exploration. Unfortunately, when relationships end, these images and messages can also be shared as a way of embarrassing or harming the other person.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

We live in a world that has developed various forms of birth control, offering significant power in determining when sexual activity might result in a pregnancy. We live in a world where large human populations present challenges to the care of the environment and the distribution of resources.

INDIVIDUALISM

We live in a society that places great emphasis on the individual and on individual freedom. This individualism affects our sexual behaviour as well as our perceptions of self, family, society and authority. People are commonly suspicious of placing loyalty on anyone or anything except themselves. Individual freedom and privilege offer people the opportunity to express themselves in a wide variety of ways. This emphasis on the individual is in contrast to many societies that place a stronger emphasis on communities and families.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

We live in a world where family is a fundamental building block of society, and is a core factor in the formation of personal identity. Family is defined and lived in various ways by various people, influenced by cultures, contexts, family histories and personal experiences. Common to most of these varied definitions is a hope that family should be a place of nurture, care, security and support. Marriage is commonly a primary factor in the formation of families. Some people form families without marriage. Most people consider family to be extremely important to their life and well-being.

² Psalm 24:1

³ Genesis 1:22, 28

⁴ **Sexting: Just How Much of a Danger Is It and What Can School Nurses Do About It?** Gail Matthey Diliberto and Elizabeth Matthey, *NASN School Nurse* 2009; 24; 262 originally published online November 1, 2009; DOI:10.1177/1942602X09348652 <http://nas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/citation/24/6/262>

We live in a society where marriage is neither regarded as a prerequisite to sexual intimacy, nor a boundary confining it. Many couples who come to the church to be married are living together before the wedding.

SINGLES

We live in a world where single people frequently become invisible in the midst of the emphasis placed on the “traditional” family by church and community. When they are recognized, it often arises out of unsolicited and judgemental questioning about their singleness at any age—the young woman wanting to adopt a child; the elderly couple living together because marriage would possibly be detrimental to inheritances and/or pension income.

EQUALITY

We live in a society that values equality and human rights. These rights have been articulated through documents such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms declares that “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”⁵ At the same time, we live in a world where inequality and discrimination exist.

DIVERSITY AND DISCRIMINATION

We live in a world that is increasingly aware of diversity in gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and socio-economic privilege.

We live in a world aware of orientations other than heterosexual. Simple categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” do not describe the lived experience of some people. People use a variety of words to describe their own identity and reality, including: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited, queer, transgendered, intersexed, and questioning. These identity markers vary with time and place. In Canada, same-sex marriage is legally recognized by the government. While some gay and lesbian couples are able to live openly and are accepted by their neighbours, those of other than heterosexual orientation live as a minority in a heterosexually-privileged culture. Along with instances of overt, hostile, and even violent discrimination, members of this minority may experience an ongoing disconnect between their personal orientation and the assumptions, language, actions and metaphors of the heterosexual culture.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

We live in a world where sexuality, power and authority are dimensions of human interaction. We live in a world where sexual exploitation happens. Sexual exploitation includes human trafficking, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, prostitution, pornography, and rape.⁶ Sexual exploitation happens when power and authority are misused or abused. Yet the reality of sexual exploitation is ignored in many circles.

We live in a world with social and economic inequalities, where some have fewer resources and opportunities than others, making these people more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, the reality is that no context or individual is immune to exploitation.

SEX AND DISEASE

We live in a world where sexual behaviour can transmit disease. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are being increasingly detected in younger and more aged people. HIV/AIDS has had a huge effect on individuals, families, societies and nations. Social and economic inequality, as well as moral judgement associated with STIs/HIV/AIDS, hampers the process of addressing health issues where people lack information, voice, resources and authority to prevent and treat disease and to promote health.

THE CHURCH IS DIVIDED

We live in a church that is divided on how to respond to the reality of our current world. The personal and emotionally

⁵ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Section 15 “Equality before and under the law and equal protection and benefit of law.” <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/>

⁶ For a definition of “Human Trafficking,” see *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Crime*, United Nations, 2000. Part I, Article 3(a), page 42, www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf. For definitions of “Sexual Abuse” and “Sexual Harassment”, see *ELCIC Sexual Abuse or Harassment Policy, 2006*, www.elcic.ca

charged nature of sexuality means that it can be difficult to create safe, respectful space for conversation, reflection and discernment. The church is divided on how we read and interpret the Bible. When issues emerge and situations become conflicted and tense, it is tempting to take criticism personally, to choose sides and argue, or to avoid conversation with those of differing opinions.

We live in a church that seeks to engage our current context, and yearns to see how God will be active in our times.

Facing God and Being Church

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”⁷

SELF-GIVING LOVE

God’s fundamental orientation to the world is self-giving love. We are created in the image of God,⁸ and are redeemed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God’s love gives the world and its people value and worth. When we have the opportunity to serve a neighbour in need, we are serving Christ, and are treating those persons as equal in value because of Christ.⁹ It is out of God’s love for the world that the church seeks to understand its current context, and the issue of sexuality within this context.

DISCIPLESHIP

“God calls us, through Word and Sacrament, to be disciples and to make disciples. Our discipleship is defined by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁰

WORD AND SACRAMENT—GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Word and Sacrament work together so that we may face God and be a church faithful to Christ. Word and Sacrament give birth to faith, feed faith, and send disciples into a life of witness, service and seeking the reign of God, undergirded with prayer. Word and Sacrament tell the story of Christ and make real the presence of Christ. Through Word and Sacrament, God grafts disciples into the church and nourishes them there. As the church lives out its mission, it is the body of Christ; it is a sign of God’s presence and it incarnates God’s presence in the world.

WORD AND SACRAMENT—SAINT AND SINNER

Through Word and Sacrament, disciples are always aware that they are simultaneously justified and sinful. That is, through faith in Christ, we live the paradox that we are always both saint and sinner. Being saints is a gift. We are made saints by God’s forgiveness and justification, which come to us by grace through faith. Being sinners is a reality and is not an excuse for bad behaviour; it is a call to repentance, and to lifelong learning in how to live as disciples. Being sinners keeps us humble. Being saints gives us hope, life, identity and purpose. This saint/sinner reality is at work in all aspects of life, including our sexuality.

LAW AND GOSPEL

God’s Word comes to us as law and gospel. Law describes God’s expectations. Gospel declares that forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are free gifts from God through Jesus Christ. Law makes us aware of our sin, brokenness or hurt; aware of how a current moment stands in contrast to the will of God. It also makes us aware of our need for God’s forgiveness and God’s help, and drives us to Christ. Gospel keeps God’s loving relationship with us in Christ as the centre of existence. It assures us that God’s salvation is pure gift and that God’s love is constant. Faith in Christ informs every dimension of our existence as persons and as communities.

⁷ John 3:16–17

⁸ Genesis 1:26–31

⁹ Matthew 25:40

¹⁰ ELCIC’s *In Mission for Others: A Theology of Mission*, Adopted in Convention, June 2007. Originally adopted at 1997 convention as the *Evangelical Declaration*. www.elcic.ca

SUMMARY OF GOD'S LAW

Jesus summarized God's law in this way: to love God and to love neighbour. It is not always easy to decide how best to love our neighbour. In our decision-making and consideration of which actions will be most loving and beneficial, the context and life-situation of our neighbour are important.

Old Testament laws were given for the good of the Israelites. Since then, many of them have been set aside (for example, the purity laws) because they no longer applied to the contemporary context. Which laws are no longer applicable today and which ones are still applicable? When there is contention within the church regarding these issues, we are called, as St. Paul called the early church, to allow for differences and diversity for the sake of our unity in Christ and the advancement of Christ's mission.

“Agape” is a love that is active, committed, constant, self-giving and caring. It is more than a sense of comfort or good feeling. It is love that gives to another without expecting anything in return. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”¹¹ Jesus says “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.”¹²

INTEGRITY OF LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Such love is made possible by God. We love God with our whole self, body, heart, mind and soul, because God first loved us. We are able to love others because God first loved us. Our whole life is lived in relationship with God and relationship with neighbour. “In the expression of human sexuality, it is the integrity of our relationships which determines the meaning of our actions. We do not merely have sexual relations; we demonstrate our true humanity in personal relationship, the most intimate of which are sexual.”¹³

A FAITHFUL LIFE

As individuals and as faith communities, we have a call to live God-pleasing lives; to live a life of faith active in love. A life that demonstrates respect and self-control in matters of sexuality enhances the integrity of the message shared in witness and service. Our church does not endorse a permissive antinomianism¹⁴ that neglects responsibility in sexual expression. The commandment “You shall not commit adultery” means “We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word, and deed, and each of us loves and honours his or her spouse.”¹⁵ The apostle Paul describes our bodies as “a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” and calls on Christians to take seriously the effects of our choices on our relationship with God, others and self. “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.”¹⁶

Informed by the law and empowered by the gospel, we are inspired to keep the law and to do good. Law helps identify the kind of world God wants, and provides wise counsel for what creates good relationships and societies. Gospel identifies Christ-like love as fulfilment of the Law, and as the fuel, the fire, the source and the reason for all witness, service, decisions and behaviour. Gospel inspires us to serve God by being a church *In Mission for Others*. The focus is not on us; it is on God's will for the whole world and on God's sincere concern for the well-being of our neighbours.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

“Sex, marriage and family are gifts of God in which to rejoice. Their essential goodness cannot be obscured by any crisis of our time.”¹⁷ Christian faith affirms marriage as a covenant of fidelity—a dynamic, lifelong commitment between two people in a personal and sexual union. Traditionally, this has meant a commitment of one man and one woman. In Canadian law and in some other jurisdictions around the world, this includes same-sex unions. God, the source of all love, is active in marriage, offering encouragement, forgiveness, healing, and blessing. No matter how marriage is defined, Christians continue to have their lives and their perspectives challenged by Word and Sacrament, undergirded by prayer.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

¹² John 15:13

¹³ *A Statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family*, adopted by the Fifth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 25–July 2, 1970. This social statement is a document recognized by the ELCIC. www.elcic.ca

¹⁴ “Antinomianism” may be defined as “a belief that the Law was completely abrogated by Jesus so that it no longer applies to Christians.”

¹⁵ Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, quoted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, page 1161

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

¹⁷ *A Statement on Sex, Marriage and Family*, 1970

Ideally, families are places of love, care, support and the nurturing of faith. All families have times where forgiveness, repentance, healing and transformation are needed. “Families reflect all the ambiguities of what it means for human beings to be created in the image of God as good, but also to fall into sin. The heights and depths of the human condition are manifest in family life.”¹⁸ Families reflect the saint/sinner reality of our existence.

God chooses families to pass on the covenant of faith. God makes a covenant with Abraham and Sarah that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”¹⁹ Moses and his family lead God’s people to freedom. When Pharaoh threatens the life of the infant Moses, his mother and sister work to keep him alive. God uses the maternal instincts of Pharaoh’s own daughter to preserve Moses’ life. Pharaoh ends up paying for Moses’ education. Even the most reluctant participants cannot prevent their families from being used for God’s plans. When Moses is reluctant to take on this leadership, his brother and sister are there to support him in doing God’s mission.²⁰ One of God’s purposes for our families is to be a blessing to others.

Similarly, Jesus’ family acts to preserve his life when he is an infant. Jesus’ mother is his first and longest serving disciple; her service begins before he is born, and she weeps at the foot of the cross. Jesus says “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”²¹ Informed by faith in all our words, actions and choices, we ever seek to show love for all our local families as well as the whole human family.

DIVERSITY AND PRECONCEIVED BELIEFS

In prayer, Peter hears a call to step past his preconceived notions, and to engage the diversity on his doorstep. “The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’”²² Moments later, Cornelius knocks on Peter’s door wondering about the gospel. Moments before, Peter would have found it unclean and unthinkable to share a meal with Cornelius; now, he finds himself engaged in witness.

In compassion and action, the Samaritan encounters another who is very different from himself. “But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’”²³ The Samaritan demonstrates love for neighbour and foreigner; he does so with personal presence and radical generosity. Jesus’ parable reminds us that God might use the people we despise, or avoid, to carry out God’s mission.

We all have blind spots, biases and prejudices. When we use our blind spots and biases to try to articulate God’s will, we run the risk of abusing power and authority. In his ministry, Jesus forms relationships with a variety of people, including many whom society or religious leaders choose to marginalize. He eats with tax collectors and sinners, touches lepers, blesses children, and welcomes the women who anoint his feet.

JUSTICE, MERCY AND HEALING

We are called to speak and act for justice and mercy, and against injustice and abuse. The church has deep concern for thoughts, words and deeds that diminish the God-given dignity of any person, group or community. We are called to emulate Jesus’ solidarity with the broken and hurting of the world. It is our Christian duty to break the silence when power and authority are misused and abused, and to work to end sexual exploitation in all its forms, including human trafficking, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse. We are also called to examine our own actions that are perceived as oppressive, discriminatory or harmful.

NON-JUDGEMENTAL ATTITUDE

We are called to confession and repentance. For the baptized, “the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand, that daily a new person is

¹⁸ *LWF Tenth Assembly Study Book: “For the Healing of the Word,”* Part III G. *Justice and Healing for Families*, Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003, page 191

¹⁹ Genesis 12:3

²⁰ Exodus 4:14, Exodus 15:20

²¹ Mark 3:35

²² Acts 10:15

²³ Luke 10:33–35

to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”²⁴ This assertion of Luther’s, that we ourselves are in need of ongoing transformation, is a call to take a humble, non-judgmental attitude toward others. A repentant and contrite spirit communicates respect for others, and is patient in hearing and learning another person’s story. Jesus’ words are, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”²⁵

GRACE AND MERCY

God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. When we are not gracious and not merciful, when we are quick to anger, when our love is scarce and intermittent, we are out of step with God and we need to repent.

RESPECT

We are called to deliver our messages and ministry with respect. “Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”²⁶ This does not mean we speak without passion or commitment. It does mean that our words and actions focus less on attacking and arguing, and more on opportunities for new awareness, repentance, healing and God’s vision of hope.

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM AND TEMPTATIONS

“‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.”²⁷ Christian freedom is described by Martin Luther as a paradox: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all.”²⁸ In our current context, many of us have a lot of freedom; both the freedom of Christ and the freedom of privilege. We are also aware that not everyone enjoys that same degree of freedom or privilege. The question is: what will we do with our freedom?

As followers of Jesus, individual freedom implies responsibility, especially the responsibility to live out our calling as the priesthood of all believers,²⁹ and to fulfill our ministry of witness and service to the church and to the world.

Freedom in our context is also full of temptations. There are aspects of individualism which are self-serving and exalt the welfare of one individual above the welfare of others, and thus hinder our capacity to follow Christ. An emphasis on self can distract from recognizing the needs of neighbour and the needs of the neighbourhood. Many forces in our current context promote being a “servant to none” instead of being a “servant to all.” Our current culture vastly underestimates the power and effects of sin in making us too self-centred.

INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

There are differences among us regarding the interpretation of scripture, including those parts pertaining to sexuality. No matter where we may be on the spectrum of interpretation, the Holy Spirit is always trying to open our hearts to those who disagree with us and to help us learn the value of other ways of seeing and interpreting. God is calling us to faith in the Holy Spirit’s guidance and the willingness to refrain from argument, condemnation, power plays and endless restatements of our positions.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The unity of the church is a gift from God. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”³⁰ Being united in Christ does not mean homogeneity. In 1 Corinthians 12, the image of the church is one of wide diversity, united by the confession of the shortest creed “Jesus is Lord.” Each member offers a different gift, yet every gift is given and powered by the same Holy Spirit. We are urged to value each person’s gift, especially the

²⁴ Martin Luther, the *Small Catechism*, quoted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 1165

²⁵ Matthew 7:1–4

²⁶ Ephesians 4:15

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:12

²⁸ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, quoted from Timothy F. Lull, editor, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1989, page 596

²⁹ 1 Peter 2:9–10

³⁰ Galatians 3:27–28

most humble. In a time when we are more aware of the diversity of our world, it is not surprising that we also find such diversity in the church.

When we feel tension around matters of unity, and hear threats to divide, Word and Sacrament remind us to turn to God, the true source and provider of our unity. The body of Christ is an image of unity.³¹ This grand image of the church expresses connectedness, accountability, unity-with-diversity, and a way of being and doing church that is a living sign of the presence of Christ. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.”³² The depth and implications of this reality are truly astounding. God continues to transform people throughout their lives. A slogan of the Reformation was “the church must always be reforming.”³³

CHOOSING UNITY

Choosing unity over division is no small task, especially if we feel God has given us our conviction by speaking to us through Word and Sacrament, and that the witness and service of the church are at stake. Choosing to be connected with those who think differently than we do challenges us in a very different way than being among those who think like we do. As we seek to share the gospel with a diverse world, having a diverse church is a God-given advantage. If we are not feeling united, then God’s Word and Sacrament isn’t finished with us yet. “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”³⁴ The reality is that church division does occur, and at certain times helps individuals to preserve a sense of integrity. Christ invites us to recognize the faith in other believers, even as we experience the tension and challenges of life’s issues and church structures, and to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”³⁵

Doing Ministry

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”
And [Jesus] rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.
Then he began to say to them,
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”³⁶*

BE DISCIPLES AND MAKE DISCIPLES

This church is called to be disciples and make disciples. In the Gospels, Jesus’ ministry is to the whole person: body, mind, heart, spirit; and his ministry is to the whole community: individual, small group, synagogue, crowd and society. Our interest in our current context is based on Christ’s interest in the well-being of all. To be disciples and make disciples, we need to be exposed to Word and Sacrament, through which God proclaims love, calls us to repentance, gives us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, guides us toward the reign of God, and sends us into mission for others. “We believe, teach and confess that the Holy Spirit calls and gathers the whole church into the mission of God, which takes seriously both the reality of the world, and the reality of Christ, with equal care.”³⁷

³¹ See I Corinthians 12:14–31

³² 1 Corinthians 12:26

³³ *Ecclesia semper reformanda est.*

³⁴ Galatians 5:13–15

³⁵ Ephesians 4:3

³⁶ Luke 4:18–21; Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61:1

³⁷ ELCIC’s *In Mission for Others: A Theology of Mission*. www.elcic.ca

PRAYER

This church is called to pray while it does ministry. As Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration, he encounters some of his disciples attempting to exorcise an unclean spirit from a boy.³⁸ The disciples are failing. Jesus rebukes the spirit and heals the boy. When the disciples ask why they couldn't help the boy, Jesus says, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"The mission of this church, as an expression of the universal Church and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people in Canada and around the world through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments and through service in Christ's name."³⁹ In Word, sacrament, witness and service, this church wants to seek the kingdom of God.

CELEBRATE SEXUALITY

This church commits itself to celebrating the truth that sexuality is part of God's good creation.

UPHOLD DIGNITY

This church seeks to uphold the dignity of all people.

CREATE SAFE SPACES

This church seeks to create safe, respectful space for conversation, reflection, teaching and discernment on matters of sexuality. This church trusts that such discernment will lead to opportunities for mission, local and global.

OPPOSE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This church is called to oppose sexual exploitation in all its manifestations. This includes addressing social and economic injustices that leave people more vulnerable to exploitation. This church will be critical of messages, images, policies and practices that diminish the dignity of individuals or groups. This church seeks to journey with, learn from, and advocate for those who have been exploited.

This church seeks to support people in choosing not to engage in exploitive behaviour. This church seeks to learn ways to support those who are sincerely trying to repent of oppressive behaviour.

ACT FOR JUSTICE

This church understands a ministry of justice to include accompaniment, awareness and advocacy. "Accompaniment" is journeying in solidarity with those who are experiencing hurt, brokenness or exploitation. "Awareness" is learning about the root causes of sexual injustice and exploitation. "Advocacy" is communicating with governments and other leaders regarding the need for policies, practices and resources to address particular issues surrounding sexuality, and being a voice for the voiceless. In being such a voice, the language of human rights helps the church speak to civil authorities, in order to communicate concern for those who experience oppression, to request practices that promote social justice, and to proclaim God's desire for the dignity of all persons. Accompaniment, awareness and advocacy are most effective when based on authentic relationship.

SUPPORT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

This church is called to support families and the processes of healing, no matter how family is defined. This church commits itself to welcome and show hospitality as one step towards the healing process.

This church recognizes the vital role that congregations play in demonstrating care for persons and in doing ministry with families. Jesus promises that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."⁴⁰ Through worship, including life passages such as marriages, baptisms, prayers for healing, and funerals, congregations walk with families and invite families to place all circumstances in God's hands. Through learning and teaching, congregations help families to understand faith, to nurture values and to grow as disciples. Congregations remind families that their purpose is to be a blessing to others; through faith, they can be witnesses of Christ's love to each other, and to the wider community.

³⁸ Mark 9:14–29

³⁹ *ELCIC Constitution*, Article IV, Section 1. www.elcic.ca

⁴⁰ Matthew 18:20

This church recognizes that given the diversity of contexts in which congregations do ministry, congregations will be led by the Holy Spirit to find vital, creative and unexpected ways to do ministry for, with and through families.

SUPPORT SINGLES

This church recognizes that, like Jesus, congregations engage in ministries to the whole person: body, heart, mind and soul; and to the whole community: individual, small group, church, crowd, and society. Congregations help individuals to develop a stewardship of life that “seeks justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with God.”⁴¹

This church is called to support individuals by providing opportunities to develop healthy relationships that offer friendship and support through a faith community. This church affirms the value of celibacy as a legitimate and worthy calling for those who choose it.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

This church affirms the value of marriage. This church recognizes that, for a variety of reasons, some individuals are not called to marriage, and some couples do not choose marriage, or choose to delay marriage. This church seeks to support individuals, couples and families in the processes of growing in faith and discipleship, no matter how family is defined. This church is called to teach that healthy relationships are built on a foundation of trust, respect and commitment.

MINISTRY AND DIVERSITY

This church acknowledges diversity of opinion on how to respond to the reality that people of orientations other than heterosexual are members of our neighbourhood and are faithful members of this church. Our church is affected by the biases of our heterosexually-privileged culture, and by our society’s call for more openness. Working from a rich and faithful practice of Word and Sacrament, members of this church have come to very different opinions on these matters.

Opportunities for ministry will be maximized by permitting congregations to engage in practices that more fully enable persons of various sexual orientations to live as members of the body of Christ and as co-workers in ministry. This would empower congregations to support families and the processes of healing, no matter how family is defined, and to help nurture disciples who “are responsible persons made in the image of God.”⁴²

CREATE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

This church commits itself to engaging the diverse faces of the world in which we live. This church recognizes that meeting diverse peoples and forming a truly inclusive community will be a journey of discovery that will include moments of discomfort and anxiety. This church celebrates the vital role that congregations play in helping diverse people of faith to meet and to form community.

SHARE THE GOSPEL

This church accepts the challenge of sharing the gospel in this swiftly changing technological age. At its best, everything in creation praises God. “For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”⁴³ Changes in media technology have an effect on how we communicate, how we think, and how we interact as a society. Media is a saint/sinner reality. This church will use new media to praise God and to communicate the gospel. This church needs to learn about the effects of new media on the world, psychologically, socially and spiritually, especially as it relates to human sexuality.

LISTEN AND PRAY

This church recognizes that in our life together, we need to listen, and to continue to pray God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for wisdom.

OUR HOPE

This church is yearning to see how God will be active in our times, and how God will use us as agents of reconciliation in our broken world.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Micah 6:8

⁴² *A Statement on Sex, Marriage and Family*, 1970

⁴³ Isaiah 55:12

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:16–21