

## ELCA Study Group Annual Report

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In August 2009, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to adopt the Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Social Statement. This statement covered important issues: it affirmed marriage and family, and it discussed divorce and sexuality outside of marriage. It addressed social issues, taking stands against promiscuity, sexual abuse, the global sex trade, and pornography. The assembly also found a way for people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gendered relationships to serve as 'rostered' leaders. ELCA members continue to have differing opinions on how to regard homosexuality and lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. At the Churchwide Assembly, four differing positions that faithful Lutherans may uphold in relation to homosexuality were identified as part of the Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Social Statement. They are:

- Same-gender sexual behavior is sinful.
- While homosexuality may not be sinful, it does not follow God's original intention.
- Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships should be supported but not equated with marriage.
- These relationships should be supported and held in the same status as heterosexual marriage.

*Members* may believe in any one of these positions, but there will come a time when the *congregation* will have to decide which position will guide our community's actions. Following the adoption of the Social Statement, the ELCA also voted to provide an option for congregations, who choose to do so, to bless same gendered relationships, and to call pastors who are in same gender, lifelong, monogamous relationships. It is important to note that our congregation does not have to call a gay pastor and our congregation is not obligated to bless a same-gendered union.

In February of 2011, the ELCA Study Group, consisting of Ron Rye, Lara Kopf, Jesse House, and Pat Chason, formed to review the social statement on "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and corresponding ministry policy changes adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly in August of 2009. Pastor Mohan worked with the group to help provide context for the statement and to answer questions. The purpose of the Study Group was *not* to make a decision about how St. Michael regards this decision but instead to assess the interest of the congregation on this topic and determine the best of way of guiding the congregation to making a decision.

In the spring of 2011, the Study Group reached out to the congregation, inviting those who had questions or strong opinions about these actions by the ELCA to contact one of the members. Less than a half dozen members of the congregation contacted Study Group members. In September 2011, the Study Group released a document titled "St. Michael, the ELCA, and Human Sexuality." It included a survey and invited members of the congregation to share their thoughts confidentially with the committee. Eighteen (18) responses were received, some supporting and some opposing the ELCA's actions.

The first survey question asked members what they would like to learn more about, (1) the ELCA, (2) the four positions on the subject of human sexuality as identified in the *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* Social Statement, and (3) how the ELCA's decision to roster same gender, lifelong, monogamous relationships affects St. Michael. There was some interest in each topic, but the third topic received the most interest, 78% of the respondents.

The second survey question asked members "how important to you is the action by the ELCA's decision to roster pastors in same gender, lifelong, monogamous relationships?" 16 members believe it was very important, 1 somewhat important, and 2 not important.

Finally, the third question asked members "How does this action by the ELCA affect your continued membership at St. Michael?" 8 members responded "It does not affect my membership, I'm happy at St. Michael," 5 responded "I am not sure how this affects my membership; I would like St. Michael's to take a position on this matter before I make my decision," and 6 members stated "It does affect my membership."

Overall the committee felt that while there are a number of members of St. Michael who have strong feelings about these actions by the ELCA, there wasn't enough interest within the congregation to require immediate action. The Study Group's recommendation is that at a future time, education on how the ELCA's decision to roster same gender, lifelong, monogamous relationships affects St. Michael be provided for the congregation. Additionally, the Study Group continues to invite any members of the congregation, especially those who felt these actions by the ELCA affected their membership, to contact the Study Group members or Pastor Mohan for further discussion.