

## HONOR AND UPHOLD THE SCRIPTURES ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY

WHEREAS, the confession of faith in the ELCA constitution (2.02) “accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life”; and

WHEREAS, the Scriptures testify that God created the gift of sexuality (Genesis 1 and 2; Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 5:28-33) and this gift is to be celebrated (Song of Songs); and

WHEREAS, while the Scriptures clearly hold marriage in high regard as seen in Jesus’ teaching of God’s design for marriage and his confrontation of Mosaic divorce law (Mark 10:2-12) and in the call to fidelity within the Christian community (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:16-19), they also offer without condemnation various cultural patterns for marriage including multiple wives and concubines [Abraham, Jacob, David], levirate marriage [Genesis 39], forced marriage when a virgin is seized and violated [Deuteronomy 22:28-29], and daughters as property of their fathers [Jacob and Laban’s daughters, Leah and Rachel, in Genesis 29], use first century household patterns based in Aristotle [Colossians 3:18-4:1, Ephesians 5:21-6:9, 1 Peter 2:18-7], and limit one wife only to men who aspire to bishop [1 Timothy 3:1-2], all of which creates the need to use reason and experience to discern what the church is to teach and live today; and

WHEREAS, the heart of Acts [Acts 10:1-11:18] has the foundational story of Peter and the Gentile Cornelius where discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in this experience triumphed over text [Genesis 17:1-14] and tradition [generations including Jesus]; and

WHEREAS, a further reading of the story of the acceptance of Gentiles into the church without the God-given practice of circumcision shows us the Spirit at work in multiple (and somewhat contentious) meetings of the apostolic community [Acts 11:1-18 followed by Acts 15:1-31] where reason was needed to evaluate the apparent conflict between experience and text and also documents later criticism and confrontation of those who refused to abide by the community’s decision [Galatians; Philippians 3:2-3]; and

WHEREAS, for some the traditional Biblical teaching about sexual life is facing unprecedented challenges in society and the church while for others the life-giving witness to the gospel and reign of God is facing unnecessary challenges because Christians are reluctant to seek discernment as to whether God is at work in new ways in the world as well as the church; and

WHEREAS, the 1993 Conference of Bishops’ Statement states, “there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church’s ministry;” and

WHEREAS, a tradition so universal and valuable should not be changed without overwhelming Biblical and confessional warrant unless, like the early church wrote in their letter to Gentile Christians, “It seems right to the Holy Spirit and to us...” [Acts 15:28]; and

WHEREAS, it is our hope and prayer that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America would act in witness to the authority of the Scriptures with all of its historically situated, culturally bound yet rich and diverse texts testifying to the grace and life-giving presence and call of God and to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the church; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Pacifica Synod acknowledges the diversity of positions held within our synod about human sexuality and marriage, asks all of its members to acknowledge the

intensity of convictions and personal pain sometimes present in our deliberations, and calls for continuing to pray for and seek the Spirit's guidance as we study together the totality of the Biblical teaching about sexual life and marriage as age-old challenges of divorce and infidelity continue to be faced and new questions of same-sex relationships are before us; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2008 Pacifica Synod Assembly request its Bishop to ask for conversation within the Conference of Bishops as to whether the experience of Peter with Cornelius might be analogous to what is seen in faithful Christian discipleship of same sex couples in committed relationships who show the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their life and witness and that, in light of Acts 10, 11, and 15, the matter of the relationship between text, tradition, experience, and reason be explored; and be it further

RESOLVED, that congregations and ministries in the Pacifica Synod be encouraged to invite married and partnered couples (with and without children) to engage in public, reflective conversation about the resources of Christian faith and the Scriptures that enable them to live with strength in these complex times to serve Christ in word and deed; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that if any of these resolves are carried out in the next year, up to 30 minutes of the agenda of the 2009 Pacifica Synod Assembly be used for members of the Pacifica Synod to report before related resolutions or memorials are considered.

*Rationale for substitute motion: First, we acknowledge that this substitute motion is long (probably too long) and complicated but find that this conversation and appeal for the Assembly to make a decision is not one that works in small "sound bites". A more comprehensive reading of the Bible brings more to bear on the issues of sexuality and marriage than just the texts quoted in the original resolution. Tradition, reason, and experience are needed in the interpretive process to discern the witness of God's Word speaking today in and through the rich diversity of biblical texts. The so-called question of "authority" is better defined as the "challenge of interpretation and application".*

*Additionally, we must grapple with the reality that in opening their lives to public scrutiny, many partnered gay and lesbian Christians give evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26). Some in the church who are not gay or lesbian are seeing the presence of God in these brothers and sisters in Christ in a way similar to Peter discerning the presence of God in the uncircumcised gentile Cornelius and then defending his action to the wider community.*

*We do remind ourselves that just because something is new does not mean that it will eventually be affirmed. More cautious than some would desire, this substitute resolution asks for us to study, reflect, dialogue, pray, and discern what this new reality means. Could our recent past experience with the issues of inter-racial marriage, divorce and remarriage, and the equality of wives and husbands help us? Is what we are now experiencing just more age-old rebellion or is God leading us to a new understanding of how human beings can live together in households and in Christian community, bearing witness to God's grace and reign? While this substitute resolution comes out of one conviction about the outcome, it does not ask for a position of the Assembly to be made at this time. It does ask for respectful, honest, and probing of these issues as the church's conversation continues in the midst of the ongoing call to be faithful to God's call to mission and ministry.*