



Frequently Asked Questions

on the Two Reconsiderations of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*

(For the most recent information, visit www.elca.org/reconsiderations.)

What is Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust?

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust is a social statement of the ELCA adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly by a two-thirds vote of assembly members. An ELCA social statement is a teaching and policy document that provides broad frameworks to assist in thinking about important social issues in the context of faith and life and in governing the institutional life of our church.

Why are elements of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust being reconsidered?

In short, parts of the social statement are being reconsidered because people from congregations and other worshipping communities across the ELCA asked the church to engage in this process. The requests for reconsideration came from ELCA members who prayerfully invited the church into this process of discernment at the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The Churchwide Assembly, composed of ELCA members, voted on the requests. The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized two reconsiderations (Memorial C3 and Motion K — see the last page of this FAQ) of the social statement [*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*](#), both by more than two-thirds majorities. The assembly did not authorize a reconsideration of the whole statement or dictate a particular outcome. Both authorizations were prompted by recognition of legal and social changes since the adoption of *Human Sexuality* in 2009.

What is the first reconsideration?

The focus of Reconsideration #1 is editorial, which means the task force will look at small, clarifying word changes only. As the authorization indicates, civil law governing same-gender marriages, public acceptance of such marriages, and diversity of family configurations have changed dramatically since 2009. The most obvious example is the 2015 Supreme Court decision that makes the marriage of any two individuals the law of the land. The task force will examine editorial questions such as whether the statement should use “marriage” for all couples. (The full text of Reconsideration #1 can be found at the end of this FAQ.)

What is the second reconsideration?

The focus of Reconsideration #2 is substantive rather than editorial, examining the coexistence in the 2009 statement of four different conviction sets, which it accepts that Lutherans can faithfully hold about same-gender relationships (the shorthand for this concept is “bound conscience”). Again, the authorization sets in motion a reconsideration of these ideas but does not determine the outcome. The outcome must align with the main arguments of the 2009 statement, and the process

of reconsideration will follow standard ELCA procedure for churchwide discernment. (The full text of Reconsideration #2 can be found at the end of this FAQ.)

Refresher on Social Statements, in General

What is a social statement?

Social statements are the ELCA's primary teaching documents. They bring the Christian Scriptures and Lutheran theology into dialogue with social analysis regarding broad social institutions and questions or the most controversial social topics. Typically they provide analysis, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives, offer vocational insight and provide guidance for the corporate witness of the ELCA and its members.

How are social statements used?

Social statements are used in a variety of ways. For individual Lutherans social statements are intended to guide moral discernment on an issue and to help people think about how their faith connects to important issues. Social statements are teaching documents that are used in faith formation and education within the church. Social statements govern the public witness of leaders within the ELCA as an institution, such as public statements by bishops or other rostered leaders, "friend of the court" briefs and public policy advocacy. They are also used in decisions about policies within the ELCA, including decisions about financial investments.

Do I have to agree with everything in a social statement?

Individual Lutherans may disagree with teachings in a social statement, but as official teachings, social statements guide the institutional life of the ELCA and govern the ELCA's policies and witness as an institution. Those on the rosters of public ministry are expected to present the teaching and policy positions as those of the ELCA. However, this expectation recognizes their freedom to disagree with these positions in their personal convictions.

Process and Protocol

What is "reconsideration"?

"Reconsideration" is the technical term for the process by which the ELCA can think again about specific elements in any of its social teaching documents. Reconsideration is not a wholesale rejection but a process to allow the church to thoughtfully, prayerfully and communally reexamine particular parts of a social teaching document.

What is the protocol for reconsideration?

ELCA social teaching and its development are governed by "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns," available at download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Policies_and_Procedures.pdf. The process for reconsideration begins with the selection of a task force and will follow the designated procedure through two cycles. Each cycle will end with possible proposals for a churchwide assembly to consider. The work is directed by Theological Ethics staff in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. Because all social statements are adopted by two-thirds vote, any changes also require two-thirds vote by a churchwide assembly.

What are the steps in each reconsideration cycle?

There are five designated steps and a possible sixth. One task force will address both reconsiderations, one after the other.

- 1) In 2024 the ELCA Church Council appointed a single task force of 16 individuals after a public application and nomination process. (Applications were received from late October 2023 to early February 2024.) Task forces are composed of ELCA members intentionally chosen for the diversity of their viewpoints, gender, race/ethnicity, geography, age and other factors.
- 2) The task force will receive presentations by specialists and engage in study and conversation to probe the questions at hand.
- 3) For each reconsideration the task force will provide a draft for public comment on any proposed wording changes and include a survey to collect public feedback.
- 4) Task force members will review all public input, such as survey results, emails or responses to the draft, and then send a proposal to the ELCA Church Council.
- 5) The Church Council will take action on any proposal and forwards their recommended action to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly (Reconsideration #1) and to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly (Reconsideration #2) for action (two-thirds vote required).
- 6) A reconsideration cycle may include hearings, longer periods of discernment, or development of study resources if the task force considers any of these wise.

Will the task force gather comments and perspectives from across the church?

Yes! Members of the task force will review all emails and letters received. As noted in step 3 above, there is a specific, extended public comment period based on a draft for each process. The email address is reconsiderations@elca.org.

Why will the process take so long?

ELCA protocol for reconsideration requires a period of approximately two to three years to allow for widespread discernment and time for feedback from anyone who chooses to participate. Since there are two reconsiderations, the extended time is necessary to provide for the thorough study and churchwide discussion described above.

About the Task Force

Does the task force represent a diversity of views?

Yes. Task force members, appointed by the Executive Committee of the ELCA Church Council, represent a wide diversity of backgrounds, competencies and perspectives. The selection process of the task force follows ELCA standards for representation and diversity.

How can I learn about who is on the task force?

Information about the development process is kept updated at www.elca.org/reconsiderations. The list of task force members can be found there, with brief bios written by members themselves.

As a matter of confidentiality, ELCA protocol does not share specific nonpublic information, such as personal contact information, about the task force members.

How can I share my concerns, questions, suggestions or perspective with the task force?

There will be a public comment period for each reconsideration. During that time you can share your thoughts about any proposed text changes through an online survey or in a scheduled hearing. *At any time* you also can email concerns and perspectives to reconsiderations@elca.org. Due to the volume of emails, not all messages may receive an individual response, but all messages will be shared with members of the task force.

How will the task force share information with the church?

Updates about the task force's work will be posted to www.elca.org/reconsiderations. In addition the task force will regularly report to the ELCA Church Council. Announcements about public comment periods and other activity will be shared through standard ELCA communications.

What This Means ... and What It Doesn't

Does the 2009 statement still govern the official stance and practice of the ELCA?

Yes, the 2009 social statement still governs the official stance and practice of the ELCA, unless changes are adopted at a churchwide assembly.

Will the task force be reconsidering the whole 2009 social statement?

No, the 2022 Churchwide Assembly did not authorize a reconsideration of the whole social statement or dictate a particular outcome. The outcome must align with the main arguments of the 2009 statement and the process of reconsideration will follow standard ELCA procedure for churchwide discernment.

Addendum: Assembly 2025 Actions

Wording of Reconsideration #1 -- editorial (Memorial C3)

To authorize a social statement reconsideration to revise *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) so that its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018). While references would be reviewed throughout the whole statement, the following sections are designated for reconsideration as described here: [reference may be found at www.elca.org/socialstatements]

- “Marriage: shelter and context for trust” p. 15. This would not reconsider the idea of marriage as shelter and context for trust but would consider the import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals;
- “Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships” p. 18f. Revision here would not change this church’s current understanding that recognizes four identified positions of bound conscience within its life. p. 19, but would review wording about “publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same-sex relationships” in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples;
- “Loving families: ground and source for social trust” p. 21f. Review here would consider references to diversity of family configurations; and

To authorize the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Church Council to approve the parameters and expense budget of this process and identify the revenue source(s) to provide for this revision to be considered as early as the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Wording of Reconsideration #2 – substantive (Motion K)

To authorize a possible revision of the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* which reconsiders the church’s current concept of the four positions of bound conscience. This revision would focus on pages 19-21 (“lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships”) and any other references to the four positions of bound conscience.