

MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

IN THE ALBERTA CONTEXT

PREAMBLE

1 Marriage, family and human sexuality are the aspects of life in which we experience
2 our most intimate relationships with other human beings. These relationships are
3 integral to who we are as humans and they provide the living context for us to love
4 our neighbour as we have been loved by God. As much as anywhere, the Two Great
5 Commandments are kept, or they are broken, in these intimate relationships.
6 Humanly speaking, it is in these living contexts that we experience deeply
7 meaningful relationship, deep loneliness and solitude, or something else along the
8 continuum between.

9 The pastoral statements that follow are made necessary because the Church, as the
10 Body of Christ, has a holy obligation to relate to, and be in ministry with, the society
11 of which it is a part. In the past three decades, marriage, family and human sexuality
12 have changed and evolved in most profound ways. These most intimate human
13 relationships in our ‘here and now’ are no longer what they were in the ‘there and
14 then’.

15 Increasingly, life-partners relate to each other today without benefit of marriage.
16 Nearly half of marital relationships in the Alberta context are common-law
17 relationships established by the mutual decision of partners to cohabit. Nearly half of
18 traditional marriages terminate in divorce. Today we commonly see serial
19 monogamy as individuals enter into numerous relationships over the course of their
20 lives – one after another.

21 The Canadian government’s 2005 *Civil Marriage Act* changed the definition of
22 marriage from one man and one woman who are not closely related to “the lawful
23 union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.” Addressing this change in law,
24 the ELCIC in Convention in 2005 and 2007 considered motions “to encourage
25 Synods to develop ways to best minister to people who live in committed same-sex
26 relationships, including the possibility of blessing such unions.” These motions were
27 defeated but discussion and debate continue.

28 In recent history, a family consisted of a mother, a father and 2.2 children. Today
29 there are many configurations of family: traditional, single-parent, blended, families
30 headed by two fathers or two mothers, step-families, provisional or short-term
31 families, and so on.

32 Sexuality has been deified (or demonized) by society – a society that seemingly
33 cannot get enough of sex. Advertising, the entertainment industry, the clothing
34 industry, and all the media have discovered that sex sells. In response, they sell sex –
35 real or imaginary. Pornography is rampant and readily available. Trafficking in
36 women and children is a burgeoning industry, nearly eclipsing the trafficking of
37 drugs and arms. Reserving sexual intimacy with another until marriage is a rare thing
38 today – considered a nostalgic and quaint practice. Casual sex and ‘hooking up’ are
39 the norm for many people today. Ours is plainly an over-sexed and sexualized
40 culture. Every culture of every era has had trouble dealing with sex and sexual
41 issues. The Puritans tried to deny it, the Kings and Queens had their illicit liaisons,
42 the milkman stories are legion from time immemorial, and how many relationships
43 did Jacob, David or Solomon have. On the outside we have been one thing. The
44 public persona has been a mask while privately something else has been going on in
45 the lives of the rich, the famous, the poor, the professors, the clergy, the men and
46 women of life.

47 Same-sex orientation and behaviour, as well as same-sex civil unions or marriages
48 have gained the credence of our society, at least to the extent that these are
49 recognized and protected in the legislation of the land. Homosexuality continues to
50 be a matter of debate in some faith-communities; for other faith-groups, sexual
51 behaviour other than heterosexual continues to be condemned. There is no consensus
52 in our Church today on other than heterosexual behaviour or relationships.

53 This culture is not waiting for the Church’s pronouncements on marriage, family and
54 sexuality. The Church’s “yes or no,” “right or wrong,” “sin or not-sin” quite frankly
55 falls on almost deaf ears in the general population. Nevertheless, the Church will, and
56 must, continue to speak – even as it will and must speak on a host of life-issues.

57 More important than what the Church says to society today is the question of how the
58 Church relates to, and ministers to, people living their lives in the ‘here and now.’ As
59 disciples of Christ, we recognize that the ones to whom we can minister, the ones
60 with whom we can share and be the Gospel, are the people around us in our society.

61 Society's views concerning marriage, family and sexuality do not reflect the
 62 viewpoint, ethics or values generally accepted by Christians. They never have. Yet
 63 this is the reality in which we must live, and move and have our being as followers of
 64 Jesus.

65 In this context, the Synod of Alberta and the Territories of the Evangelical Lutheran
 66 Church in Canada established a Task Force to address long-standing theological
 67 assumptions and practices with respect to marriage, sexuality, and family. While the
 68 Task Force was ultimately not able to reach consensus on the theological
 69 underpinnings for statements on marriage, family and sexuality, it did make
 70 considerable progress in preparing such statements for this contemporary context. A
 71 blue ribbon panel, convened by the bishop of the ABT Synod, endeavoured to take up
 72 the Task Force's work and move it ahead to working draft form. After prayerful,
 73 charitable, and considered discussion, we offer these statements for consideration.

74 ***The Theology of the Cross as our Theological Foundation***

75 *(We are indebted to Douglas John Hall, eminent Canadian theologian and Luther scholar, who*
 76 *articulates Luther's theology of the cross in an accessible way in his book The Cross in Our Context,*
 77 *Fortress Press – Minneapolis, 2003. We draw heavily on this book to explain the premises of the*
 78 *theology of the cross.)*

79 In April of 1518, Martin Luther penned the Heidelberg Disputation in which he first
 80 introduced the basis of his theology of the cross. The key theses are numbers 19, 20
 81 and 21:

82 [19] That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon
 83 the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those
 84 things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20 NRSV).

85 [20] He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the
 86 visible and manifest things of God seen through the suffering of the cross.

87 [21] A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross
 88 calls the thing what it actually is. (as quoted in Hall, p. 16)

89 Luther's theology of the cross is grounded not in a vague optimistic humanism but in
 90 a deep sympathy with human weakness and wretchedness (Hall, p. 21). Since for
 91 Luther human existence is a frail and uncertain business, God's chief characteristic is

92 not sovereign omnipotence but astonishing compassion. For Luther, then, the essence
93 of God is God's "suffering-with." (Hall, p. 22)

94 The theology of the cross tells us first about God. God does not view humankind as
95 so wretched that it deserves death and hell. On the contrary, God views humankind
96 and the whole creation as so beautiful, so precious, that its fulfillment and its
97 redemption are worth dying for. (see Hall, p. 24) In a sermon based on Luke 24:12-
98 24, Joseph Sitler concludes:

99 ... this story makes very clear that there is a steady growl of anger at the heart
100 of the holy, that the love of God for his human family has a hard and resolute
101 intention. What that is, and certainty about God's will to see it through, comes
102 out in the phrase "...that my house may be filled." Not our house, but his
103 house; not according to our specifications, but according to his will; not
104 according to our preferences, but in ways appropriate to the awesome
105 carelessness of his love. (See further The Care of the Earth, by Joseph Sitler,
106 Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Facets ed., 2004.)

107 The most poignant expression of this awesome love is found in Matthew 9:36...
108 "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were
109 harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." *Com-passio* literally means
110 "suffering with". But to understand the depth and degree of this "suffering with" we
111 need to plumb the Greek text for the verb *splanchnidzomai* which bears the meaning
112 "to enfold the other with your innards" – to make the other's condition and situation
113 your own. In the case of Matthew 9, what is expressed is Jesus' profound
114 identification with, and accompaniment of, the last, the least and the lost... the
115 harassed and helpless.

116 This means something radical and (for Lutherans) something uncomfortable.
117 Doctrine must pass the test of real life. Doctrine must serve life, not life doctrine. So
118 if, in order to hold onto doctrine I have to lie about life as it really is, or repress what
119 is actually happening to real people in the real world, then doctrine is functioning
120 falsely. (see Hall, p. 28) The theology of the cross invites us to set aside the
121 simplistic, "textbook easy answers" to very difficult human questions. We are stuck
122 with the questions and cannot leave them behind, since the world God loves cannot
123 be left behind. The questions will be there, Hall contends, long after the religious,
124 philosophical, scientific, and other answers have been given. (Hall, p. 32) Do we

125 actually believe that our own ideas and agendas might need to be “crucified” so that
126 we can hear God’s agenda for us? How quickly do we “crucify” the ideas or
127 suggestions by appealing to literalism on the one hand, and tolerance on the other?
128 Could it be that our self-righteousness and deeply-held opinions need to be crucified
129 so that we can once again hear the message of the Gospel?

130 If we understand the cross of Jesus Christ to be God’s movement toward the world,
131 then we must also understand that as followers of Jesus we are drawn into this same
132 movement. Discipleship means being sent with increasing insistence “into all the
133 world”. The world to which we are sent is not in stasis; it is, instead, a roller coaster
134 of constant and unrelenting change. (see Hall, p. 40, 41) Nor is this call toward the
135 world a great comfort to many Christians, who find living out their faith within the
136 confines of the sanctuary and their individual lives much less of a stress than
137 engaging our kaleidoscopic society. In this, we are not much different than Peter
138 who, that morning on the Galilean shore, heard these ominous words from his Lord:
139 “When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you
140 wished. But when you grow old (can we read “mature” here?) you will stretch out
141 your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you
142 do not wish to go.” (John 21: 18, 19 NRSV) Relentlessly interfacing with our society
143 and its people may very well feel this way for many Christians – being taken where
144 we would rather not go. The problem is that we have few others to relate to in Jesus’
145 name other than these harassed and helpless ones whom we cannot avoid seeing if we
146 dare to look with eyes of faith and compassion. We know all too well that
147 unprotected exposure to the world is never painless, even at the best of times. (p. 53).
148 Suffering is not the object of discipleship, only its consequence (p. 55). We must
149 assume that the cross, while it is for us the cross of Jesus Christ, is also a symbolic
150 statement about the human predicament. (p. 70)

151 Douglas John Hall speaks of the grandeur, and the misery, of the human being. The
152 grandeur? – this has to do with humanity’s having been created in the very image of
153 God. And the misery? – one need merely consider the woundedness and brokenness
154 so rampant in our own lives, and the lives of those around us in our culture. Hall
155 gives voice to this when he writes:

156 “The truth that the cross of Christ embodies about us is certainly that we are
157 loved by God, but that we are loved as prodigals, as problematic creatures, as
158 beings whose alienation from God, from one another, from ourselves, and

159 from the inarticulate creation is so great that we will accept love only on our
160 terms, when it corresponds with our desire to be affirmed without asking of us
161 that we become authentic and without requiring of us any depth of
162 commitment comparable to the love that is being shown to us.” (p. 102)

163 The theology of the cross gives rise to a church of the cross. If we preach a theology
164 of the cross, we will have to become a community of the cross. Anything else would
165 represent a kind of hypocrisy (see Hall, p. 140). If the church does not see this
166 suffering and if, seeing it, it does not take the burden of it upon itself, then its whole
167 life must be called into question. (p. 152, 153) It could be said of the theology of the
168 cross that its chief end is the birth of a community pushed toward the world despite
169 its own resistance and reluctance. (p. 183)

170 The institutions of marriage and family, and the questions around human sexuality in
171 today’s context cannot be avoided nor can they be dealt with or solved by the Body of
172 Christ. Nevertheless, remembering the grandeur and the misery of humanity,
173 remembering Jesus’ compassion for the harassed and helpless before his eyes, there is
174 nothing else to do but enter into the suffering of our society, and – indeed – the
175 suffering of our Church around these issues. And while we “suffer with” our society
176 we extend the ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastoral care and empathetic
177 accompaniment to all. The love of Christ compels us, and the grace of God empowers
178 us to enter fully into this difficult reality.

179 *Statement on Marriage*

180 **Prologue**

181 The recent Statistics Canada report *Family Portrait*, summarizing data on families
182 and households from the 2006 census, provides clear evidence of significant changes
183 regarding marital relationships in Canadian society. The report notes that, “For the
184 first time in 2006, there were more unmarried people aged 15 and over in Canada
185 than legally married people.”

186 **Statement**

187 Marriage is a gift of God. It is an expression of God's creation, intended for the joy
 188 and support of those who enter it and for the well-being of the whole human family.
 189 In marriage, God blesses us with the gift of companionship, gives us a relationship in
 190 which (ideally) we grow in love, celebrate our sexuality, and provide a place for the
 191 birth, care and nurture of children. God intends marriage to be a life-long
 192 relationship of caring commitment.

193 Jesus affirmed the covenant of marriage.¹ The Holy Spirit calls those who are united
 194 in marriage to be living signs of God's grace, love and faithfulness. This union
 195 expresses God's loving purpose to create and enrich life. It is meant to be a mutual
 196 relationship in which love is expressed and experienced daily as we learn to bear one
 197 another's burdens and share each other's joys. The public expression of mutual vows
 198 of lifelong commitment and fidelity establishes a foundation in which the support of
 199 the Christian community and the community at large is experienced. Within the
 200 Christian community, the blessing of God is invoked.

201 We follow the Lutheran reformers in viewing marriage as a sacred vocation to which
 202 many are called. According to this view, marriage is an expression of God's will for
 203 maintaining good order in all of society. Martin Luther believed marriage should be
 204 held "in high esteem as a divine work and command."²

205 Many persons are single, either by choice³ or due to the circumstances of life. As our
 206 Church has said, "There should be no exaltation of either the single or the married
 207 state, one over the other."⁴ We acknowledge the special needs of single persons,
 208 whether widowed, divorced or never married, and endeavour to support them in the
 209 community of faith.

210 Many Canadians are choosing cohabitation over marriage for a variety of reasons.⁵
 211 We are aware that in some instances there may be forces that provide impetus for

¹ Mark 10:6–9. NRSV

² Luther, *A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*.

³ 1 Cor. 7:8. NRSV

⁴ *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, affirmed by the ELCIC in 1991.

⁵ Although "married couples constituted the largest group (68.6%)" of census families in Canada, "their proportion has been steadily decreasing for the past 20 years." "A census family is composed of a married couple or a common-law couple, with or without children, or of a lone parent living with at least one child in the same dwelling. A couple can be of the opposite sex or of the same sex." (Statistics Canada, *Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006, 2006 Census*)

212 entering into such a cohabiting relationship. We believe that the full value of the
213 marriage covenant and God's promise for the couple cannot be achieved through
214 cohabitation. We encourage cohabiting couples to consider carefully whether the
215 status of their relationship truly seeks the best for each other and the community and
216 offers the best framework for a trusting relationship to grow in depth and mutuality.

217 Divorce is not God's intention, but may be a necessity in some circumstances,
218 particularly when a relationship becomes abusive and there is no desire or ability to
219 change, or when trust and fidelity are broken and there appears to be no chance for
220 reconciliation. We declare God's forgiveness and grace for such broken relationships
221 and invite persons who have experienced the loss of trust, fidelity, companionship
222 and security in such circumstances into our community to experience the healing love
223 of Christ.

224 We call our church to respect the rights of all people, including members of our
225 communities whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual. We condemn
226 violence and discrimination based upon sexual orientation. We encourage continued
227 dialogue with Christians of other sexual orientations and their families to foster
228 greater understanding and awareness, as we re-examine our practices as a Christian
229 community.

230 As the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, we acknowledge that we do not have full
231 consensus, and we are not of one mind, on the matter of same-sex behaviour or
232 marriage, or any other sexual orientation or configuration. We have disagreement in
233 the interpretation of Scripture and we bear the burden of human frailty. We continue
234 in respectful discussion, upholding the freedom to discuss the differences we voice,
235 in the hope that God will reveal to us God's will and that God will provide us the
236 means and the will to preserve the unity of the church.

237 We invite the congregations and rostered ministers throughout the Synod to enter into
238 a similar dialogue in order to better understand marriage in the present context and to
239 enhance the ministry of the church to all.

240 *Statement on Family*

241 Family is a gift of God. Genesis describes the first human family: its inherent
242 diversity of gender, temperament, and avocation. Family is the first and most
243 important unit of community that we experience. It provides us with our most

244 intimate experience of sacrificial love, personal nurture, spiritual inspiration, and
245 social preparation for life in the many and varied manifestations of the larger
246 community in society. Our civil and faith communities are modelled on the concept
247 of family members living in supportive relationships that adhere to mutually agreed
248 upon expectations (i.e., a *covenant*). The family lives within various levels of public
249 community.

250 During his earthly ministry Jesus expanded the understanding of family. When told
251 that his mother and brothers were outside, wishing to see him, pointing to his
252 disciples, Jesus said ... “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother
253 and sister and mother.”⁶

254 We are children of God through Christian Baptism. In this rebirth we are joined to the
255 ultimate *extended* family that we call the communion of saints. Our birth families are
256 still where we begin the journey, but we are called out of the nuclear family to find a
257 fuller identity in the Body of Christ. And from there we are called into the world to
258 witness and serve our neighbours worldwide.

259 Human beings create families in ways that are strange, even frightening, to some. The
260 church has long included single-parent families and blended families. Co-habiting
261 couples and their children are now part of many congregations. Same-sex couples are
262 coming forward, seeking baptism and Christian education for their children. Jesus
263 welcomed the little children; so too do we, as a Church. We say this because *the*
264 *welfare of children is paramount*. We must bear clear witness here: children need
265 healthy, stable and loving families. If we fear for some of these families, have doubts
266 about them, or even disapprove of them, then all the more reason for us to bring them
267 into the sanctuary of the Christian community.

268 Furthermore, there are childless families – such as the elderly, members with health
269 challenges, and others who are vulnerable – also needing and deserving our support.

270 We recognize the threat to families from such stresses as poverty, our consumer
271 mentality, and negative images of family in the media. These forces serve to erode
272 the covenantal values of family. Our Church is called daily to name and unmask the
273 sources of these stresses on family and to help in this milieu.

⁶ Matthew 12:48-50 (NRSV)

274 Here in Alberta and the Territories, we find that our boom-and-bust economy, driven
275 by forces largely outside our provincial and national boundaries, presents enormous
276 challenges to child-rearing families. Parents are separated from their children and
277 each other. Adult children are separated from their aging parents, and the old are
278 separated from their grandchildren. All struggle to provide the basic needs of life in a
279 materialist culture that increasingly assumes that every adult must be engaged in
280 remunerative employment – such that children are a luxury, part of a so-called
281 lifestyle choice.

282 Families, composed as they are of broken human beings, are always challenged from
283 within. A fallen world's materialism, idolatry and violence threaten to overwhelm
284 our families from without. Lutherans, as members of the priesthood of all believers,
285 are called to actively support our neighbours' families and our own, in obedience to
286 our baptismal call to serve the family of the risen Christ.

287 *Statement on Human Sexuality*

288 Human sexuality is a gift of God. Sexuality has to do with maleness or femaleness
289 and how that is experienced and expressed solitarily and in groupings of individuals.
290 It is that God-given aspect of our humanity which moves us toward relationship,
291 intimacy and companionship. It involves the capacity to form deep and lasting
292 bonds, give and receive, conceive and bear children, commit oneself to life with
293 another, touch and be touched, love and be loved. We demonstrate our true humanity
294 in personal relationships, the most intimate of which is expressed through physical
295 sexuality.

296 Our human sexuality, like all parts of our human nature, has been corrupted by sin.
297 Desiring power over others in all its forms (lust) rather than love often influences
298 how we understand our human sexuality. Sex can also be engaged in such a way that
299 the partner becomes a sex-object over which power and control can be exercised.
300 This is a misuse of sex and a sin against one's partner as well as one's own body. Our
301 pursuit of the desires of the body, and our faith in human wisdom and righteousness,
302 damages our relationships with each other and with God.

303 Human sexuality and love are intended to be the extension and embodiment of divine
304 love into human form. God created us as sexual beings – male and female. Through
305 the creation narrative of Scripture we understand God holds both male and female to
306 be of equal value in fulfilling God's purpose in creation.

307 A sexual relationship is the means God gives us to fulfil our sexual desires in loving
308 and joyful ways. While it is a wondrous gift, physical sexuality does not by itself
309 constitute moral justification for sexual behaviour. Our sexuality is to be a source of
310 joy and fulfilment, not a source of enmity, strife, self-gratification or a means of
311 gaining popularity.

312 The way in which we express our sexuality is a matter of communal concern because
313 of its impacts upon the individual, the family, and the community at large. The
314 restored relationship God has with us in Jesus is a model for our relationship with
315 each other. The healthy expression of our sexuality enhances our relationships with
316 other human beings and helps us better understand the fullness of the relationship that
317 exists between God and human beings. Portions of Scripture in the New Testament
318 make clear that it is in a loving, monogamous nuclear family that human beings are
319 best able to engage in relationships marked by deep intimacy, trust, love, mutual
320 support and fidelity – the ideal human relationship. A strong marital unit is
321 considered essential for societal well-being. Sexual intercourse cements the marriage
322 bond. Sexual fidelity makes certain that families remain intact and ensures clear
323 paternity / maternity and property rights. Finding sexual satisfaction within marriage
324 ensures order is maintained.

325 Our sexual behaviour is shaped by powerful physical needs, biological drives and
326 psychological needs for intimacy. Failure to properly nurture these needs and drives
327 can lead to sexual irresponsibility. We need to be cautious of the influence which
328 societal forces bring to bear on sexual behaviour. What is acceptable in society has
329 changed through time and place. While the Church must be aware of the social
330 forces influencing the understanding of sexuality and sexual behaviours, it must
331 primarily be attuned to God's will as revealed in Scripture.

332 The early church was influenced by the existing understandings within Jewish
333 society. As Christianity spread, the concern for purity of the body came to dominate
334 the understanding of human sexuality. Monogamous male-female unions, modelled
335 after the relationship of Christ with the church, were upheld as the choice of those
336 who were unable to be celibate. From the second century until the Reformation the
337 celibate life was considered more virtuous than marriage. The reformers lifted up the
338 physical expression of one's sexuality within marriage as acceptable and even holy.

339 God has given human beings the choice of whether or not to act upon their sexual
340 urges. Expressing love for one's partner by engaging in mutually satisfying sexual
341 relations is one choice God gives to human beings. Jesus' reiteration of the
342 Commandments and his own teaching on marriage in the New Testament Scripture
343 makes clear that the choice to engage in sexual relations is limited to the marital
344 relationship. It is within the marital relationship that couples have the freedom to
345 develop their individual selves to their fullest. The church needs to encourage and
346 support couples so that the marital relationship can grow and deepen as the couple
347 passes through the various stages of their life together.

348 A second choice God gives to human beings regarding their sexuality is celibacy.
349 Persons may be celibate for a lifetime or for a certain length of time because of
350 circumstances within their lives. Persons who are celibate need to be supported by
351 the church in developing relationships which fulfil our human need for
352 companionship at the same time as they are enabled to abstain from sexual intimacy
353 in their relationships. Celibacy can be a spiritual gift given by God to some human
354 beings as a means of fulfilling their role within God's kingdom.

355 Our sexuality can be used in ways which are life affirming or in ways which cause
356 shame and guilt. Our society has made sex and human sexuality into a commodity
357 which can be used to further the interests of particular groups such as advertisers and
358 the media. Human relationships have been damaged because society has made the
359 expression of human sexuality in sexual relations the way human beings relate to
360 each other. Non-sexual intimate relationships between people of the opposite or
361 same sexes are questioned because society has trouble understanding that there are
362 many ways of being intimate with people. Engaging in sexual intimacy with multiple
363 partners has led to a variety of social problems, including broken relationships, the
364 rise in Sexually Transmitted Infections⁷ including HIV/AIDS⁸ and unwanted

⁷ Chlamydia is the most commonly reported Sexually Transmitted Infection in Canada. Close to 63,000 cases were reported in 2004, the highest number of cases since the disease became reportable in 1990. Gonorrhea rates have nearly doubled from 14.9 per 100,000 in 1997 to 28.9 per 100,000 in 2004. More than 60% of cases are attributed to males. Syphilis is escalating in both males and females, but more so in males. 2004 rates for men were 15 times higher than in 1997. 82% of male cases and 72% of overall cases are attributed to men aged 30-59. (The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, *Sex Facts in Canada 2006*.)

⁸ At the end of 2005 there were an estimated 58,000 people in Canada living with HIV - up from 50,000 in 2002. Of these, around 30% were unaware of their infection. It is estimated that between 2,300 and 4,500 new HIV infections occur in Canada each year. In the period 1985-2001, men having sex with men (MSM) category accounted for 62% of adult HIV diagnoses for which exposure category was reported. The equivalent proportion was 39% in

365 pregnancies.⁹ Teenagers are engaging in sexual activity before they are emotionally
366 and mentally mature enough to deal with the consequences.

367 On the matters of same sex orientation and behaviour, same gender unions and
368 marriages, and the issues attendant to orientations other than heterosexual, there is no
369 consensus in our Church at this time. But we are of one mind in stating that the
370 inclusive call of Christ means we have a ministry to and with all persons and their
371 families regardless of their sexual orientation, as we are able.

372 In conclusion, it is in our marital and family relationships and in the expressions of
373 our sexuality that we have the most intimate and powerful opportunities to love our
374 closest neighbours – our loved ones. And in loving them as we love ourselves, we are
375 responding to the God who loved us first with an everlasting and unconditional love.

376 We commend these pastoral statements to our Synod and its members for their
377 guidance, reflection and discussion. May this document speak to us and our world
378 with a faithful and compassionate voice.

2006. In recent years around a quarter of new adult HIV diagnoses have been among women. Nearly two thirds of the women diagnosed in 2006 were probably infected through heterosexual contact. By the end of 2006, there were 20,669 AIDS diagnoses in Canada. At least 15,556 people with AIDS have died. Among adult AIDS cases reported, the proportion accounted for by MSM fell from about 75% in the years prior to 1994, to 35% in 2005. The heterosexual exposure category increased from 10% to 35% in the same period. Women have accounted for around 25% of adult HIV diagnoses in each year since 2000. This proportion has more than doubled from 12% in the period 1985-97. From 1988 to 2005 there has been steep increases in AIDS infections among aboriginal and black people. These two groups are now highly over represented. The provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec account for 85% of the population of Canada and for 95% of the nation=s AIDS diagnoses. (*Canada HIV & AIDS Statistics Summary* found at www.avert.org/canstatg.htm)

⁹ Among 15-19 year old Canadian females, the pregnancy rate declined from 41.7 per 1,000 in 1998 to 40.2 in 1999 and 38.2 in 2000. The number of teenaged women who give birth has also declined, from 16.8 live births in 1997 to 12.1 in 2003. (The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, *Sex Facts in Canada 2006*.) In the past more teenage pregnancies ended in a live birth than in an abortion. However, in 1997, with the decline in live births to teens, abortion became the most common outcome of teenage pregnancy. This had been the case for younger teens in most years since 1993. (Statistics Canada, *Teenage pregnancy*.)

379

WELCOMING STATEMENT

380 We call our church to respect the rights and preserve the dignity of all people,
381 including members of our communities whose orientation is other than heterosexual.
382 We condemn any form of violence or discrimination based upon age, gender, sexual
383 orientation or any other factor. We encourage continued dialogue with Christians
384 whose orientation is other than heterosexual to foster greater understanding and
385 awareness. We pledge ourselves to be the compassionate presence of Jesus to all.

386 **A Christian Model for Study and Dialogue in Resolving the Issues**
387 **Challenging the Church**

388 **1. Faith Grounded in Truth**

389 We begin with God's actions: God grants grace and salvation; God brings people into
390 relationship and community; God engages people in conversation; God alone gives
391 life to all. As Christians we are first and foremost a people grounded in Christ alone.
392 We cannot intelligently or with integrity proceed in any discussion without
393 committing ourselves firstly to Christ alone in prayer and Scripture. In prayer we
394 humble ourselves before God's sovereignty, acknowledging that without the
395 indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we cannot discern rightly. God's Word encounters us
396 in the Bible, and that Word transforms us – it conforms us into Christ.

397 **2. Commitment to the Process (Listening)**

398 Each of us as individuals is unique and purposely created by God. Life has provided
399 each of us with a different road to follow. This has given us our own unique
400 experiences and understanding of God, faith, and life. It is important that we honour
401 and uphold one another as we share our experiences, backgrounds, and
402 understandings of life and the challenge of Christian faith. All persons have the right
403 to share their story openly and without interruption. Each of us has the duty to listen
404 without criticism, without judgment, with sympathy, compassion, and understanding,
405 for none have walked the road of life without stumbling, or taking the wrong path.

406 **3. One in Faith, one in Christ**

407 In sharing our stories we recognize our shared humanity and the value of our
408 diversity. We share a common faith, a common hope, and are motivated by the same
409 love. Despite our differences, we identify common goals and find our unity in the
410 love of Christ and his Church.

411 **4. Dialogue and Understanding**

412 In Christ we find our common identity, vocation and destiny. The advancement of
413 our unity of purpose is achieved by sharing of perceptions not opinion, in the
414 exchange of information and the challenging of assumptions, and in the sharing of

415 recognized resources that add to the body of knowledge and the increased
416 understanding of the topic under discussion.

417 **5. Unity of Purpose**

418 Together we seek the common good in harmony with the word of God. Our open
419 discussions naturally lead us to conclusions and formulations that seem to be a
420 reasoned estimate of a good that will be of benefit to all. (...It has seemed good to
421 the Holy Spirit and to us... Acts 15:28 NRSV).

422 **6. Thanksgiving, Prayer and Dedication**

423 Through these discussions we have come to understand and love others and ourselves
424 a little better. Sometimes these events take place in spite of our humanity. Always
425 we recognize and value the direction and inspiration God has provided throughout the
426 process. This is a time to praise God for God's goodness and leading us to value and
427 appreciate one another more. It is a time when we can commend ourselves in prayer
428 and invite God's participation and blessing in the working out of what the agreement
429 will mean for each individual and the Church. We can dedicate ourselves to working
430 through the formulation for the good of all. We can now better, with unity of
431 purpose, dedicate our time, strength, and resources to the advancement of the
432 Kingdom.

433 *Endnote*

434 *Life has a way of moving us from familiar and comfortable places to new places where we may*
435 *experience ourselves suddenly as strangers and aliens. From happy homes to broken homes, from*
436 *finding the perfect mate or friend to the trauma of estrangement or divorce, from the safety and*
437 *security of belonging to an "in" group to finding ourselves outsiders, because of some disagreement or*
438 *change in direction.*

439 *Of all the forms of separation just mentioned, the saddest and most painful in our contemporary world*
440 *are the separations that can take place within religious groups, and in particular, among Christian*
441 *communities. In the secular and political realm we expect division and even deviousness. In religious*
442 *communities that preach love, acceptance, equality and forgiveness, we expect more. It's the wounds*
443 *we suffer from religious people and religious institutions that hurt the most. It is within this arena that*
444 *our struggle toward spiritual maturity can be put to the severest of tests. Nowhere can*
445 *"homelessness" be felt more deeply than when we feel estranged from the Christian community.*
446 *(p. 78, 79)*

447 *Robert Durback, editor*

448 *Henry Nouwen: In My Own Words, Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri, 2001*

449 **Members of The Task Force on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality**

450 ***In the Alberta Context:***

451	The Rev. Robert Taylor	Jonathan Mohr
452	Walter Goos	The Rev. Rolf Nosterud
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454	The Rev. Eleanor Ness	The Rev. Peter Van Katwyk
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457	+Telmor Sartison
458	+Stephen Kristenson
459	The Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen
460	+Ronald Mayan

Appendix A

Guiding Principles from Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions

(as articulated by the Task Force)

WORD ALONE

We begin with the Living Word (John 1), the *vox vivendi* which is primarily Christ – this Living Christ who has the words of eternal life. There is a canon within the canon of Scripture from the Lutheran perspective, and we agree with Luther that ‘whatever bears Christ’ is key in determining this.

CHRIST ALONE

Christ is the incarnation of God in our world. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (see John 1 NRSV). In Christ’s sacrificial life and death he revealed God’s love for humanity and atoned for our rebellion from God. In Christ’s resurrection he ushers in a new creation. In faith we enter this new creation.

We are not justified before God by our own merit or good works, but are brought into a right relationship through the sacrifice of Christ. We enter this relationship through God’s gift of faith, trusting that Christ’s death has made satisfaction for our sin and we are free to live a life of service for others. (Philippians 3:8b-11 NRSV)

This good news of Christ is the centre of the Scripture. Our reading of the Scripture is through the lens of Christ’s life. While Scripture contains both law and gospel, as Christians we interpret the law in the light of Christ’s redemptive life.

The gospel breaks into our human experience, addressing all of life’s ambiguities. The gospel bears human despair and brings hope for new life. It assures us of God’s free, unconditional, and unmerited acceptance of us in Christ, despite our sin and alienation from God, from others, and from ourselves. Sensing God’s Word as gospel evokes faith and trust in God’s gracious act of restoration, engendering a loving response lived out in obedience to God and in service to others.

Living the good news of the gospel challenges and threatens the evil within us and around us. The gospel frees us from ideologies that prevent us from acknowledging and repenting of the injustice and inhumanity that we and our society promote. It increases opportunities for Christ-like service. Such service is costly, and may include suffering for the sake of the gospel.

492 **SCRIPTURE ALONE**

493 The principle – “Scripture alone” – was established when the reformers saw the
 494 Church could and did make mistakes concerning doctrine. “Scripture alone” affirms
 495 Scripture has the highest authority in the life of the church, as summarized in the
 496 Formula of Concord (see Kolb & Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, Formula of
 497 Concord, Epitome, p.486). Scripture, therefore, is the norm for our faith, followed by
 498 the Lutheran Confessions and the traditional formulations of the Church (the Creeds).

499 The phrase “Scripture interprets Scripture” acknowledges the danger of using non-
 500 scripture to interpret Scripture. Without the Holy Spirit we work against the message
 501 of the divinely inspired Scripture. (see Kolb & Wengert, *The Book of Concord*,
 502 Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, Freewill)

503 It is also in the spirit of “Scripture alone” that our constitution reads; “This church
 504 confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God,
 505 through which God still speaks, and as the only source of the church’s doctrine and
 506 the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the church” (Article 2, Section 3).
 507 The principle of “Scripture alone” gives focus to our lives as we struggle to
 508 understand God’s grace and work out God’s will (see 2 Tim 3:16-17 NRSV).

509 **GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE**

510 The one great theme of the Lutheran faith is justification by faith alone through grace
 511 alone, apart from the works of the law. *The Formula of Concord* emphasizes that
 512 “faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue but
 513 because it lays hold on and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy
 514 gospel.”¹⁰ Romans 5:18 NRSV states that “just as one person’s trespass led to
 515 condemnation for all, so one person’s act of righteousness leads to justification and
 516 life for all.” Grace is thus God’s love for every human being which is so strong that
 517 God willingly sent Jesus to make us right with God. There is a great cost to grace,
 518 the life of Jesus. The church can cheapen grace by offering forgiveness for sin
 519 without repentance and the demand for discipleship.

520 Faith is the trusting hope that the God of the Law is also the God of the Gospel. It is
 521 the recognition that human effort does not engender God’s forgiveness. Only Jesus’
 522 loving sacrifice on the cross does this on our behalf.

523 It is God’s Word which creates faith in human hearts and minds. This faith in turn
 524 creates the Church, the living being embodying God’s grace and forgiveness to the

¹⁰ The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III Righteousness, 13 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) p. 541.

525 world. The Church is the place where the Gospel is preached and taught in its truth
526 and purity.

527 **Sin**

528 The stories of creation and the fall tell us that while human beings were created in the
529 image of God and there is the potential for good within human existence, the actual
530 human condition is one of profound brokenness. This brokenness means that the
531 preference, the default mode for sin is within each person even before they are born.

532 Sin is fundamentally rebellion against God and opposition to God's grace. It is
533 humanity's inability to fear, love and trust in God, its pursuit of the desires of the
534 body, and its faith in human wisdom and righteousness rather than God's. Sin
535 disrupts our relationship with God by our refusal to live thankfully and gladly by the
536 grace of God. We deny our dependence upon God and reject our need for our fellow
537 creatures, particularly those who are different from us. While sin is a universal
538 condition, it is also a self-chosen act for which we are responsible. It insinuates itself
539 into all human activities. Sin can be most seductively at work under the guise of
540 doing good. Modern society tends to privatize sin and restrict it to the behaviour of
541 individuals.

542 **Discipleship**

543 Faith creates a new, clean heart within the believer. What good works we do in this
544 life follow from this faith. Christian life is grounded in the grace of God. It is based
545 on our union with Christ and directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. By the
546 power of the Holy Spirit believers grow more and more like Christ. This means that
547 Christian life is patterned after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is
548 thus a continuous dying to the old way of life and a rising to a new way of life. Our
549 service to God and others often includes making choices that run contrary to society's
550 ways. Such choices are made out of a love for God and our fellow human beings.

551 **Simultaneously Justified, and Sinner**

552 As Christians, we live as both sinner and saint; we need to bathe daily in the
553 baptismal promise of forgiveness in Christ. Christ's sacrifice of love makes all
554 followers of the Way one body with Christ and, therefore, with one another. We
555 become a "communion of saints" even though sin remains active in the lives of all.
556 Each individual's strengths or weaknesses, peace or blessing, is shared by all
557 members of the body; in Christ we are drawn together like family. The church is "a
558 community and a gracious exchange of our sin and suffering with the righteousness

559 of Christ and the saints.”¹¹ As a communion of saints, we are each and all sinner and
 560 saint, and also “a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses”¹². In this
 561 community we live in the hope of God’s grace and mercy, while at the same time
 562 praying for the strength to fulfil our vocation as Christians in a broken, suffering
 563 world.

564 **THE TWO REALMS OF GOD’S RULE**

565 God exercises his authority in two realms; the realm of creation and the realm of
 566 redemption. The realm of creation is finite and fleeting, while the realm of
 567 redemption is eternal and everlasting. The realm of creation requires order and
 568 responsibility to limit the effect of sin and to create a just world. The realm of
 569 creation is ruled through force and regulation. In the realm of redemption, God’s rule
 570 is invitational through the provision of Word and Sacrament, as conscience and the
 571 response of the heart cannot be compelled; it is a world of faith.

572 God reigns through the gospel, as expressed in Word and Sacrament, in the
 573 redemptive realm. Here God’s promises of grace, forgiveness, and acceptance are
 574 persuasive. God’s grace enables believers to “love God with all our heart, soul, and
 575 mind” and to serve God freely and solely out of this love. In this realm faith
 576 appropriates the promise of God in Christ and gratitude is expressed in adoration of
 577 God and service to humankind. We live in a new creation within the Body of Christ –
 578 a redemptive community subject to no one, yet subject to all in service.

579 Civil authority is exercised in the realm of creation by and on behalf of Christian and
 580 non-Christian alike; both being equally subject to authority. The civil law is thus a
 581 good gift of God in that it serves to limit and correct human behaviour, and promotes
 582 the common good. In the realm of creation the authorities are agents of God’s rule in
 583 God’s world in order to maintain the order of creation. The various activities,
 584 agreements and commitments that govern human relationships in this realm, are
 585 subject to reason that prevails in maintaining order and justice.

586 However, civil authority is not absolute. Christians must therefore be alert and
 587 prepared to protest when civil authorities mandate values and/or behaviours that
 588 make us betray our Christian faith.

¹¹ Luther’s Works, Volume 35, p. 60.

¹² Book of Concord, p417

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Marriage, Family and Sexuality

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Response Sheet

592 It is our hope that the foregoing statements are read, discussed, reflected upon and
593 critiqued. Your comments and suggestions are welcomed. Please use this response
594 sheet (or one of your devising) to share suggestions and comments with the ABT
595 Synod office (10014 – 81 Ave., Edmonton, AB. T6E 1W8 or fax (780) 433-6623 or
596 E-mail kbudgell@elcic.ca).

597 **Comments Concerning the Preamble**

598 **Comments Concerning the Theological Foundations**

599 **Comments Concerning the Model for Study and Dialogue**

600 **Comments Concerning the Statement on Marriage**

601 **Comments Concerning the Statement on Family**

602 **Comments Concerning the Statement on Human Sexuality**

603 **Comments on the Welcoming Statement**

604 **Comments on Appendix A – Guiding Principles**