# **Theological Implications of the 2009 ELCA Decisions**

## Clarity and compassion regarding sexuality and Scripture

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) resolved to recognize "lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships" and to authorize ordination into the pastoral ministry for individuals living in such relationships. As the largest Lutheran denomination in North America, the ELCA's actions have led to significant controversy and confusion among Lutherans. Pastors, congregations, districts, and national leaders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) have encountered questions regarding our Synod's position on matters pertaining to homosexuality, the appropriateness of cooperative relationships among our two church bodies, and what Lutheran identity means today.

The LCMS has consistently expressed its understanding that same-gender sexual activity is contrary to the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> It has also joined together with the other 33 members of the International Lutheran Council in unanimously affirming that:

[T]he lifelong committed union of one man and one woman is the place the Lord intends for human sexuality to be lived out. Biblical passages which address the practice of homosexuality do so in terms of disapproval. Rooted in the Bible's witness and in keeping with Christian teaching through 2000 years, we continue to believe that the practice of homosexuality—in any and all situations—violates the will of the Creator God and must be recognized as sin. <sup>3</sup>

While the current discord in Lutheranism and other Christian traditions regarding these questions is distressing in many ways, we believe this is also a time of opportunity. Many are asking not only what various churches teach and practice, but are also wondering about the theological implications of these beliefs and practices. In debates about homosexual issues, churches have an opportunity to testify to even more foundational truths and convictions, such as different understandings of biblical authority and also a different understanding of marriage. This is revelatory of something more than matters of sexuality and sexual behavior.

The question of the Bible's authority involves a variety of important issues such as divine and human authorship, inspiration, and matters relating to the proper interpretation of Scripture. While a brief statement such as this cannot fully address these many aspects of the authority of Scripture, one issue is particularly important in the immediate context. What is the moral authority of the Scriptures, given that they were written millennia ago? Answers, even among Christians, range from those who see practically no relevance to the Bible's direct moral assertions to those who see the Bible's doctrines (including its teaching about moral issues such as homosexuality) as having full and complete authority.

Some believe that the Bible's relevance to contemporary moral questions is not decisive, arguing that what the Bible says is culturally bound, conditioned by the limited understanding of its human authors. For this reason, it cannot be expected to address contemporary questions directly and with final authority. From this perspective, the Bible's references to homosexual conduct—which consistently condemn homosexual acts as sinful (e.g., Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10)—are of limited relevance today. Those who take this position typically argue that the authors

of Scripture did not understand homosexuality as people today have come to experience it. They assert that the biblical texts against homosexual activity only condemn "abusive or coercive sexual behavior, or sexual behavior that expresses a rejection of God's sovereignty" and not homosexuality *per se*. They maintain that the biblical authors did not understand, for example, that homosexual behavior stems from a disposition that people have not chosen, that homosexuality is "natural" to some individuals, or that homosexual individuals can have a fulfilling, committed sexual relationship with a person of the same gender. From this standpoint, the church's moral guidance in matters of sexuality has only to do with couples (same-sex or otherwise) being faithful to each other. So long as differing moral perspectives on homosexual acts are held in good conscience, other Christians and the church ought to respect the validity of a variety of perspectives.

The LCMS cannot and does not share this conclusion or the understanding of Scripture on which it is based. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the living Word of God, through His prophets and apostles. We affirm the infallibility of the Scriptures because they are "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16 NIV)—that is, though they are written by men, God is their primary author and every word of Scripture is His word. Therefore they are not subject to all the same assumptions which apply to other ancient literature. We also hold the Scriptures to be understandable and truthful in their plain or simple meaning and that no other writing, understanding, or experience may call into question that meaning.<sup>7</sup> In other words:

While the Biblical writers used terms current in the everyday parlance of their times, Biblical doctrinal formulations are not on that account culturally conditioned in the sense that they are provisional or tentative; in Spirit-taught words they express what God has revealed in a way that remains permanently valid and is for all times the only normative way of talking about the topic they treat.<sup>8</sup>

This view of scriptural authority leads us to affirm that where the Bible speaks clearly regarding matters of human values, conduct, or behavior, such teachings may not be denied or qualified, but must have continuing relevance in every era of the Church. Teachings contrary to the Scriptures must not be tolerated in the Church. For example, while some may debate whether the Bible specifically addresses the matter of same-sex attraction as it is understood and experienced today, nevertheless, the Bible plainly and simply forbids same-sex genital activity as contrary to the will of God. This biblical prohibition applies to every generation.

Moreover, the way we live out our sexuality must be understood in the context of what God, our Creator, has revealed in the Scriptures about marriage. The Bible reminds us that God created man and woman for one another. United in marriage, the two become one flesh in the sexual union which, according to God's blessing, may also result in the procreation of children (Gen 1:26-28; Gen 2:18-25). Martin Luther calls marriage "the first of all institutions" for which God created man and woman to be different from one another, in order "to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God." <sup>9</sup> Such a view of marital sexuality can only be heterosexual in nature. <sup>10</sup> The apostle Paul makes this very point in his references to "natural relations" as those between men and women, rather than samegender sexual relationships (Rom 1:26-27). It is noteworthy that the apostle's teaching in Romans 1 is confirmed by the understandings of marriage and sexuality that are held by virtually

all religions and cultures both today and historically. This affirmation of heterosexuality is indeed written on the human heart (Rom 2:15). 11

In agreement, then, with 2000 years of Christian teaching, with the consensus of the vast majority of Christians today, and with virtually all cultural traditions and understandings regarding marriage, the LCMS believes and teaches that same-gender genital sexual activity—in every situation—violates the will of our Creator and must be recognized as sin. The LCMS not only affirms the biblical view of marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, it also teaches that unmarried men and women, regardless of their sexual inclinations, are called to live in sexual chastity and celibacy (see Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:8-9, 25-35). "The male-female duality as the created pattern of human fellowship requires of us fidelity to our sexual identity, a willingness to be male or female." The Bible's teaching regarding sexuality and marriage is clear. When societal opinions change, or even if the social sciences claim contradictory views, the Scriptures must remain the final and determinative norm for Christian doctrine and practice.

In discussions regarding homosexuality in church and society, legitimate concern is raised over the ways homosexual individuals have often been excluded and even vilified by Christians. Our Lord's intentional outreach to those who were marginalized and excluded during His earthly ministry is a reminder that the Scriptural judgments against homosexual behavior must not become the cause for hatred, violence, or an unwillingness to extend the Gospel's promises of forgiveness and reconciliation to the homosexual or any person caught in sin's traps. Homosexual sins, like heterosexual sins of adultery or promiscuity—or any sins in any area of life—are all atoned by Christ, who "came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10 ESV). Loving, compassionate recognition of the deep pain and personal struggles that same-sex inclinations produce in many individuals, families and congregations may not be neglected in the name of moral purity. To do so is indeed hypocritical, for all have sinned (Rom 3:23).

We therefore fully affirm the International Lutheran Council's concern for the pastoral care of homosexuals:

[W]e declare our resolve to approach those with homosexual inclinations with the deepest possible Christian love and pastoral concern, in whatever situation they may be living. Though we affirm the demands of God's Law without reservation, we Christians confess that the sins of the world have been forgiven through Christ's suffering and death on the cross. As the redeemed children of God, we lead our lives as "saints and sinners" at the same time. We hope for full renewal and sanctification, but realize that these hopes are not completely fulfilled in this life. This applies to countless temptations. Our sinful condition calls for a lifetime of prayer and struggle. <sup>13</sup>

This same pastoral concern for those struggling with sin of any form is rooted in Scripture's teaching that Jesus came that we might have life and have it in fullness (John 10:10). Our stance on homosexuality, therefore, is affirmative of human life as God's gift. The healing voice of Jesus—Sacred Scripture—seeks to lead us into the richness of the life God intends for us. Prohibitions against adultery, homosexuality, and promiscuity of any sort are kind words, warning us against behavior that would diminish or destroy human wholeness. After all:

The heart, center, and ultimate message of the Bible is that God wishes to be gracious to sinners for Christ's sake. Unless one hears this voice of the Gospel (Ap IV, 257, 274; XII, 39), that is, the voice from heaven speaking absolution to terrified consciences (AC XXV, 3: Ap XII, 99), the whole point and purpose of the Scriptures has been missed.<sup>14</sup>

# Practical implications of ELCA decisions

What practical implications do these theological convictions have for us in the LCMS today? In particular, what do they mean for our relationships with brothers and sisters who are in the ELCA and with other Lutheran churches that have authorized ordination for individuals living in same-sex relationships? Most specifically and practically, what do they mean for our involvement in inter-Lutheran cooperative relationships and activities with the ELCA?

We must first address an immediate result of the ELCA decisions. Contacts from ELCA individuals and congregations with LCMS congregations and officials have increased significantly since August 2009. Many are asking about the differences between the LCMS and the ELCA on sexuality issues. Others are considering or have decided to leave the ELCA. We will not encourage discord in the ELCA, but we cannot turn away from those who dissent from ELCA decisions regarding human sexuality. To do so would be to deny our own convictions. We will welcome ELCA Lutherans and congregations who consider membership in our churches and denomination and will encourage the cause of Confessional Lutheranism worldwide. This includes seeking to speak charitably and truthfully about the differences between our churches on scriptural authority and the implications this has for sexuality and other issues. <sup>15</sup>

A second result of ELCA decisions has been increasing questions from within the LCMS regarding the future of cooperative relationships between the ELCA and LCMS in inter-Lutheran agencies and organizations devoted to works of mercy and relief for those in need. In order to attempt to address this complex question, it is first helpful to recognize that cooperative efforts involving human care for those in need are based on the sharing of a common goal, not on complete doctrinal unity. This has been the understanding of the LCMS historically. The CTCR's report *Theology of Fellowship* summarizes this position as follows:

Our Synod should clearly recognize that, in cases of necessary work on the local, national, or international level, where the faith and confession of the church are not compromised, and where it appears essential that the churches of various denominations should cooperate or at least not work at cross purposes, our churches ought to cooperate willingly to the extent that the Word of God and conscience will allow.<sup>17</sup>

It may be helpful to identify two fundamental principles in this quotation from *Theology of Fellowship*. First, the church cannot compromise its faith and confession. The church's confession of faith is essential to its very existence, for the church's central purpose is proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and administering His sacraments. Indeed, the church, in its essence, is nothing more than "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." <sup>18</sup>

The second principle affirms circumstances in which churches "ought to cooperate" "to the extent that the Word of God and conscience will allow." That is, while we dare not compromise the confession of the Gospel, neither may we completely isolate from other Christian churches, as if we recognize no truths in common and share no common goals.

In light of these two principles, it has been the longstanding practice of confessional Lutheran churches to distinguish between joint participation by churches and church workers in Word and Sacrament ministry ("altar and pulpit fellowship" or *communio in sacris*) and cooperation between churches in matters of physical need (*cooperatio in externis*). To maintain such a distinction carefully and conscientiously prevents both compromise of the teachings of the Christian faith and disregard of human needs which can be addressed more effectively by groups working together than by individuals or churches working on their own.

Because of doctrinal differences, the LCMS is not now nor has it ever been able to be in a relationship of altar and pulpit fellowship with the ELCA. Nevertheless, we have engaged in many cooperative activities with the ELCA, nationally and locally, in order to meet physical needs. These cooperative activities, however, are threatened by the sexuality decisions of the ELCA because, in some cases, the ELCA's new affirmation of same-gender relationships may contradict understandings or goals that have enabled cooperative activities in the past. As one example, the CTCR already in 2006 addressed the decision of an adoption agency to treat same-gender relationships as equal to marriage for adoptive purposes. The opinion states: "On the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture regarding homosexual behavior and about God's will and design for marriage and the family as foundational units for society as a whole, it is the express opinion of the CTCR that a policy of placing adopted or foster children into homosexual contexts would stand in opposition to the official doctrinal position of the LCMS."

In areas where we currently have working arrangements with ELCA congregations and entities, the status of those working relationships is dependent on policies and actions taken by the various entities from national to local levels. We do not believe the ELCA's recent sexuality decisions should necessarily or summarily end our work together in these agencies. However, we hope and expect that the leadership of such entities will respect the theological position of the Synod (including its position on same-gender sexual activity) and avoid any policies or decisions which would require us to cease our support and involvement in their activities.

We cannot dictate the exact direction(s) various cooperative relationships will take in the future, primarily because the nature of agreements between ELCA and LCMS congregations and entities varies on a case-by-case basis. Frank and serious discussion on this issue needs to continue on various levels so that convictions and beliefs are not compromised and that worthy projects, activities, and relationships between our church and others may continue wherever possible. We urge LCMS participants in such cases to make decisions about whether to continue involvement on the basis of the principles we have discussed. We also suggest the following questions for consideration in making these decisions:

1. Is the purpose of the joint work fully consistent with the positions, policies and objectives of the Synod?

- 2. Do cooperative efforts imply doctrinal unity with the ELCA or endorsement of ELCA positions on same-sex relationships or other matters of disagreement with the LCMS?
- 3. Does the joint agency or organization distinguish itself as an entity from the churches that support it?
- 4. Are all the policies and programs of the organization consonant with the doctrinal position of the LCMS?
- 5. Do the individuals who lead the organization openly support and encourage efforts, positions, or policies which compromise the theological stance of the Synod?

We urge LCMS participants to answer such questions as these and to make decisions about whether to continue involvement on the basis of the principles we have discussed.

### Lutheran identity in a time of confusion

In a time of such controversy between Lutheran churches, even more important questions emerge.<sup>21</sup> Who speaks for Lutherans today? If Lutheran churches are divided on issues of sexuality, does this mean sexual morality is an open question for Lutheran theology? In light of the Great Commission to proclaim the Gospel to a dying world, what does it mean to be Lutheran today and does it really matter?

The assertions of this document may appear as only one voice in an intra-family argument unless we also address the matter of Lutheran identity. One way to reaffirm and to summarize what it is to be Lutheran Christians is by first respectfully recognizing two prominent groups of fellow Christians in the world today: Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Lutherans are Christians who stand in the middle between these two movements in the Christian church. We stand there, "in the middle," affirming strengths of both although we cannot completely affirm all the teachings of either.

We stand together with Evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ—because evangelical means Gospel-centered. Evangelical Christianity understands the central truths that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19); that Christ's saving work is given freely, without cost, as sheer gift (Rom 3:24); and that even the faith which receives this saving gift is freely given by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 12:3; Eph 2:8). Justifying faith in Jesus Christ, Messiah and Lord, results also in confidence in the Holy Scriptures, for there we hear His living voice and know Him as Lord and Savior by means of the prophets who promised His coming and the apostles He designated as witnesses to His life, atoning work, and teachings (2 Tim 3:15; John 14:26; 10:35; and 2 Pet 1:20-21). As evangelical Christians we are grounded in the Bible, God's written and infallible Word. The Bible, and not human traditions (even laudable church traditions), provides final assurance about what is true and what the church is to believe and do.

We are also "catholic" Christians. We confess with Roman Catholics the ecumenical Creeds of the western catholic tradition. Catholic means universal and complete.<sup>23</sup> We believe that there is only one true faith and all who share it belong to Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:4-6). This one faith is faith in the Triune God, who is only known through Jesus, the Son of God who reveals the Father and who sends the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). The Athanasian Creed calls this the "catholic" faith.<sup>24</sup> This means we cannot compromise doctrinal convictions, nor can we forget that all those who confess faith in the Triune God are fellow Christians. The catholic faith is universal through the

generations. As part of the church catholic we fully and simply believe Christ's promises about Baptism (Mark 16:16) and the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:26-28).

Catholic wholeness means the Christian faith is intended for the whole of humanity—all eras, regions, and cultures. Christianity is not an American religion or a Western religion, but is for the whole world (Matt 24:14). Similarly, evangelical conviction means that we are called to Christ's mission, sharing His good news of salvation for all the world (Matt 28:19). An understanding of the Christian faith that is both evangelical and catholic in character reaches out across languages, cultures, oceans, and continents, back through history, and forward into eternity, sharing the good news that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19).

None of these teachings is a Lutheran discovery and no single one is unique to us. This does not make us *generic* Christians. We are *Lutheran* Christians, but not because we wish to preserve Luther's name or institutions named after him. Rather, we are convinced of the validity and the necessity of an understanding of the Christian faith and life which is consonant with significant elements of both Evangelical and Roman Catholic teaching. The controversy over human sexuality is a case in point.

Across the spectrum of Christianity, including both Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches (as well as Christians from virtually every denominational tradition and throughout the world), church bodies and their leaders have declared their firm conviction that same-gender sexual relationships are contrary to God's will. Evangelical (and classical Protestant) leaders have emphasized that the contrary view contradicts the Scriptures. Roman Catholic (and Orthodox) churches have pointed out that the contrary view contradicts the "Great Tradition" of Christian thought that has endured throughout millennia. As a Christian church body that seeks to be both evangelical and catholic, we are fully at home with this consensus and find in it a confirmation of Lutheran theology and identity.

The ELCA's decisions stand in sharp contrast to this genuinely ecumenical Christian consensus. The foundational document for the ELCA's controversial approval of same-gender genital sexual relationships describes itself as "a distinctly Lutheran approach" to human sexuality. <sup>26</sup> As Lutheran Christians, we find this claim to be deeply troubling. We have provided this brief overview of what we are convinced is an authentic Lutheran identity because we strongly disagree that "a distinctly Lutheran approach" to Christian teaching should separate us either from the evangelical consensus regarding the teachings of Holy Scripture about human sexuality or from the catholic tradition's perspective on Holy Marriage and its belief in the incompatibility of openly homosexual activity with Christian life. It is necessary for Lutherans to maintain theological distinctiveness, such as the central focus on justification of the sinner by grace through faith, the Law-Gospel dynamic of pastoral care and preaching, Baptism's gracious power to effect regeneration in faith, and the forgiving, bodily presence of our Lord in His Holy Supper. Such distinctiveness, however, is entirely based upon the Scriptures and fully consonant with the beliefs of the central tradition of Christian truth through the ages. That is, such beliefs while hallmarks of Lutheran theology—are both evangelical and catholic. However, any purported distinctiveness which minimizes biblical authority or isolates us from the church catholic's consensus regarding homosexual activity is sectarian and a departure from what makes Lutheranism truly distinctive.

This impacts the Gospel itself. A church body's acceptance of homosexual activity promotes a false security about behavior and conduct which God has forbidden and from which He longs to redeem us. As such, it leads to a false gospel: to self-justification rather than that justification for repentant sinners which God has promised to all who trust in His forgiving mercy through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray that our brothers, sisters, and friends in the ELCA, and any others who have departed from this *biblical and Christian* understanding, would reconsider—even now—their actions.

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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To the glory of God March 15, 2010

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#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> ELCA 2009 Assembly Legislative Update (Aug. 21, 2009), page 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> LCMS convention resolutions (e.g., 1973 Res.. 2-04; 1983 Res. 3-14; 1998 Res. 3-21), CTCR reports (e.g., *Human Sexuality*, 1984; *The Creator's Tapestry*, 2009), and public statements by the President (e.g., <a href="http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=15618">http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=15618</a>) have unambiguously affirmed the understanding that same-gender sexual acts are contrary to the will of God, while at the same time expressing concern for the spiritual well-being of individuals with same-sex attractions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Same-Gender Relationships and the Church: A Statement from the International Lutheran Council" (ILC), meeting in Seoul, South Korea, August 31, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies, the ELCA, page 5, available online at <a href="http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality/Report-and-Recommendation.aspx">http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality/Report-and-Recommendation.aspx</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, the social statement adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, p. 20, for example, states: "On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships

that we experience today." <a href="http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality.aspx">http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality.aspx</a>.

- <sup>8</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS (CTCR), *The Inspiration of Scripture* (March 1975), page 18, online at
- http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/Inspiration\_%20Scripture1.pdf. The report adds: "Inspiration gives the assurance that in the Bible we have sound doctrine imparted in Spirit-taught words, that the Biblical doctrinal formulations express the content of revelation in terms that dare not be discarded even when the range and function of language in theology is a matter of much discussion as it is at present" (page 18).
- <sup>9</sup> The Large Catechism, par. 207. From Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 414 (KW hereafter).
- <sup>10</sup> *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, p. 15, defines marriage without reference to any procreative intent: "Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God."
- <sup>11</sup> See also *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article XXIII, par. 7, referring to "natural affection": "This love of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance" (KW page 249).
- <sup>12</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*, page 33, online at <a href="http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/Human\_Sexuality1.pdf">http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/Human\_Sexuality1.pdf</a>.
- <sup>13</sup> ILC, "Same-Gender Relationships and the Church."
- <sup>14</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology* (November 1972), page 6, online at <a href="http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/gospel\_scripture.pdf">http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/gospel\_scripture.pdf</a>.
- <sup>15</sup> A recently adopted CTCR report, *Church Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (p. 8), states: "With respect to developing relationships with individuals, congregations, groups, or entities from other church bodies, it is important to avoid either the actuality or the appearance of interference in the affairs and relationships of those church bodies. While the Synod seeks to encourage strong confessional theology and practice, it should do so in ecclesially responsible ways, without encouraging internal dissension or purposefully undermining prior relationships with other church bodies or groups."
- <sup>16</sup> The CTCR also addresses the issue of cooperative work in *Faith Active in Love: Human Care in the Church's Life* (1999), p. 27: "Christians can also organize to work together with Christians in other traditions and with non-Christians in caring institutions of society.... Such cooperation with others, either as individuals or in various social structures, need not compromise the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Cooperative endeavors of this kind, when they do not compromise the proclamation of God's Word, can be simply the living out of love that springs from a living faith. However, when other individuals or communities advocate policies and programs that are contrary to the guidance given in the Scriptures, great care should be taken by Christians not to cooperate in ways that compromise the proclamation of God's Word." See also *Inter-Christian Relationships: An Instrument for Study* (1991), p. 24, www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/interchrel.pdf.
- <sup>17</sup> CTCR, *Theology of Fellowship* (1965), p. 43, online at <u>www.lcms.org?5136</u>. The Synod, in convention, formally adopted this report in 1967.
- <sup>18</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article VII, par 1, KW p. 42.
- <sup>19</sup> This distinction between *communio in sacris* (full sharing in all the sacred things between Christian churches) and *cooperatio in externis* (cooperating in external matters of human need) is worthy of some

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For example, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, page 19, states: "We further believe that this church, on the basis of 'the bound conscience' will include these different understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, page 4, online at <a href="http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/astatement.pdf">http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/astatement.pdf</a>.

explanation. We cannot, for example, invite a minister to preach in our churches when he publicly disagrees with our doctrine. However, we may indeed work together with him in organizing relief efforts for people suffering from a tornado's devastation.

<sup>20</sup> See "Placing Adopted Children into Homosexual Contexts," a 2006 opinion of the CTCR, online at <a href="https://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=10096">www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=10096</a>.
<a href="https://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=10096">www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=10096</a>.
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<sup>21</sup>Debates over sexuality and scriptural authority involve much of Christendom. Decisions by the Episcopal Church in the United States, for example, have deeply divided not only that church body, but also Anglicans worldwide. Similarly, the ELCA's recent decisions have raised questions about Lutheran teaching, here and internationally. Not only has the International Lutheran Council felt constrained to address this, but also many churches of the Lutheran World Federation have publicly disagreed with the ELCA (and similar actions of the Church of Sweden).

<sup>22</sup> The word, *evangel*, from the Greek, simply means "good news" or "gospel."

<sup>23</sup> "Catholic" also comes from the Greek, literally, "according to the whole," referring to the universality or wholeness of the church and its complete character. The Orthodox churches of the east share with western Christians a common heritage which includes the authority of Scripture, an appreciation for the early church Fathers, and affirmation of the teachings of the first seven ecumenical councils.

<sup>24</sup> The Athanasian Creed asserts: "This, however, is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity," par. 3. See Kolb and Wengert, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, "The Manhattan Declaration," <a href="http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration">http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration</a>.

<sup>26</sup> Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, p. 1.