

# 10 Questions

## with Daniel Puls

BY DEACONESS JENI MILLER



A rostered Lutheran schoolteacher-turned-therapist who attends Our Savior Lutheran Church, Arcadia, Calif., LCMS member Dr. Daniel W. Puls, a clinical psychologist, works with people struggling with a variety of issues, including that of same-sex attraction. Although he works as a general practitioner, helping men, women, and children with a variety of issues, part of his work has also been helping those impacted by unwanted same-sex attraction. The following is an edited *Lutheran Witness* (LW) interview with Dr. Puls (DP).

**LW** | What is the biggest barrier to caring for those struggling with same-sex attraction?

**DP:** It goes back to what I learned in confirmation: that we are all fighting against Satan, the world and our own flesh. Satan wants to destroy the very representation of the image of God. He wants to destroy life, and in that, procreative acts. Our God-given drive for sexual relationship between one man and one woman is impacted, and our fallen flesh has the propensity to depart from the original intent for our sexuality.

It's missing the mark, falling far short of divine design. A significantly increased challenge is in the world; our culture today has shifted to a place of such increased tolerance and acceptance that even the idea of having that belief that homosexuality is wrong is countercultural today. Children are exposed to various expressions of sexuality as normative. It challenges our ability to stand in the truth that anything apart from one man and one woman in the bond of marriage falls short of God's design. Rather than focusing [on being] against same-sex marriage, we need to raise the standard of one-man-one-woman. That's where God's image is revealed, as recorded in Genesis 1. His image is in the relationship and complementary interaction of male and female.

**LW** | How does your Lutheran faith play a role in your work?

**DP:** It plays an important role in my work as a psychologist and in this particular issue. It allows me to have a clear perspective and balance of Law and Gospel. Specifically in my role as a clinical psychologist, through skilled listening, discerning what each person is bringing to the table is so important. Is this person coming in an act of confession or profession with this issue? In the former, someone may say, "I feel like I am wrestling with same-sex attraction, and I don't know what to do about it." There is more confession and questioning and not knowing what to do with it and feeling a sense of conflict over the issue. For the latter, it may be, "This is who I am and how God made me; I'm just professing who I am." This is not a state of contrition or repentance. ... We [the LCMS] hold a standard that is very sound and based in Scripture and the belief that Scripture is God's holy, inspired Word; this is a hallmark of who we are as Lutheran Christians.

**LW** | Why is it important to keep up the conversation on this matter?

**DP:** We don't have to keep up the conversation; it's being forced upon us. We need to keep up! On one hand, it is not any different from any other sin; on the other hand, it is a direct affront to the very image of God. Who God is and who God made us to be is foundational to our experience and existence as humans. Also, as long as we continue to stand in the truth, it's going to give opportunities to preach the Gospel, and that's ultimately what is important. The LCMS is aligned on this issue with most of Christendom who have the same message: that God's ideal and His ordained design for sexuality is for one man and one woman.



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**LW** | How are we called as Lutheran Christians to care for our neighbors or family dealing with same sex-attraction?

**DP:** Speak the truth and act loving to them in all ways, just as you would if they did not. Invite them to your home for dinner; it [same-sex attraction] is not contagious. Be kind, friendly, genuine and gracious. Jesus engaged the woman at the well in a kind and loving way, and He spoke the truth to her in a loving way.

As Lutherans, we have a strong adherence to Scripture as the infallible source of truth and the story of God’s incredible grace and mercy. We have an exemplary educational system across the life span, and we have the capacity to produce and disseminate information, ministry materials and instructional aides for use by

lay and called leaders. We could be on the forefront in this area. There are programs and ministries in existence, salient parts of which could be adopted and adjusted for use within the LCMS.

It is not just those who struggle with this issue that need support; it’s the members whose relatives or friends have chosen to enter into the gay or lesbian lifestyle, abandoning what they had otherwise been taught or formerly espoused. As a body, we have the answers and key ingredients to provide support and healing. The consistent practice of being in the Word and Sacraments, and the appropriate application of Law and Gospel, is invaluable for people seeking consistently to live a life of repentance and spiritual vitality.

