

THE LCS POSITION ON HUMAN SEXUALITY – BY DIVINE DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues such as premarital sex, pornography, divorce, homosexuality and others are no strangers to Singapore society. Though the Lutheran Church in Singapore has faithfully been teaching the Lutheran Christian perspective on such issues in our congregations through pulpit and other teaching ministries, we feel that it is time to delineate officially our stand on human sexuality, the foundation for understanding all other sexual issues.

2. OUR APPROACH

We live in a milieu of many voices. Philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, etcetera, each has shed great light on issues of human behavior. Surely human reason is a gift of God and we must exercise it as good stewards of God's gift. But as valid and insightful as these may be, as Lutheran Christians we allow the Holy Scriptures, which is God's revelation to humans, have the last say in matters of Christian beliefs and values (2 Tim 3:16, ESV).¹

We also take the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord seriously because as a Lutheran church we believe, teach and confess that our Confessions are true and valid symbols and interpretations of the Holy Scriptures.² But as Lutheran Christians our concern is not just with right doctrine and teachings but also the proper distinguishing of God's commands and promises, also known as rightly dividing law and gospel. So the approach of this paper will be to stand on the clear teachings of Scripture, the guidance of the Lutheran Confessions, and the right division of law and gospel in delineating our position on human sexuality.

We will first offer a definition of human sexuality and its biblical grounds. We will then present a section on the effects of the fall on human sexuality. Following this, we offer two sets of divine intentions implied in God's divine design. In Divine Intentions 1 we highlight three key implications: standing, stewardship, and sexuality as a gift to humanity. In Divine Intentions 2 we highlight four key sexuality issues facing Singaporeans: male and female relations other than in marriage, marriage and remarriage, homosexuality and singlehood.

3. DEFINITION

Human sexuality by divine design as described in Genesis chapters one and two, affirms the fact that we are creatures created in the image of God with distinct sexual identity as male and female for the purpose of partnering in the divine mandate to procreate and care for the world God has made.

¹ Epit 1-2; Kolb & Wengert, 486 and Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS) Constitution Article 1, Section 4.

² LCS Constitution Article 1, Section 5-8.

4. BIBLICAL GROUNDS

To understand this proposition we have to particularly look at Genesis chapters one and two.

The first thing about being human is that we are created by God. The book of Genesis opens with an emphatic and categorical statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). In other words, God created everything.³ Genesis 1:16, specifically declares that God made humans. In Genesis 2:7 we see a close connection between humans and nature, in the words, “...the Lord God formed the man [*adam*] of dust from the ground [*adamah*].”⁴ The apostle Paul says, “The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47).

Secondly, humans are created special. When it comes to their creation, the narrative slows down to emphasize their significance, concluding God’s masterpiece in a crescendo.⁵ Though made of ordinary dust (Gen 2:7), God made humans with great care and purpose. The imagery in chapter two is of a potter working the clay with his hands.⁶ And the thing that sets humans apart from the rest of creation is that they are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). This “image” is the representative royal authority and influence that God confers on humans, both male and female to carry out his continuing task of co-creating humanity and the preservation of this world.⁷ The Psalmist affirms this special position in these words: “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5).

Thirdly, humans by divine design were created with distinct sexual identity: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The third clause in verse 27 is appositional, meaning it explains the other parts of the same sentence. So the third clause “male and female he created them” explains or expands the other part of the same sentence “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;” Wenham says, “The expression ‘male and female’...highlights rather the sexual distinction within mankind and foreshadows the blessings of fertility to be announced in v. 28.”⁸ In Matthew 19:4, Jesus affirms the creation of humanity from the very beginning as male and female. So by divine design, humans exist as male and female.

Lastly, God created humans in His image as male and female for the purpose of representing Him on earth and to do His work of protecting and preserving His creation (Gen 1:26; 28-30). But God also created humans for relationships. Lockwood says, “The use of plural forms in the account of the creation of humans, ‘let us make humanity in our image’ has serious implications for human

³ Gordon Wenham, Genesis, *Word Biblical Commentary*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 15.

⁴ Ibid, p 59

⁵ Ibid, p 27

⁶ Ibid, p 59

⁷ Peter Lockwood, “Understanding Sexuality – Male and Female in the Image of God,” (January 2010): 2. Paper presented at the “Symposia on Lutheran Biblical Understanding of Marriage, Family and Sexuality” (4 - 8 Nov. 2008 KL Malaysia).

⁸ Gordon Wenham, Genesis, *Word Biblical Commentary*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 33.

sexuality. Whether the plurals indicate the assembly of the heavenly beings or whether they foreshadow the Holy Trinity in view of the Bible's *sensus plenior*, it is clear that the plurality of humanity which has at its heart the duality of male and female reflects the community that God enjoys."⁹ God also recognizes man's need for a counterpart; where God says "I will make a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18b).

5. THE FALL AND SEXUALITY

As a result of the Fall, sin pervades every aspect of human life and creation came under God's curse (Gen 3:14-19). The created world was no longer the same as before, it became disordered. Sexuality too became disordered.

In a disordered sexuality, sexual passions became unruly and unnaturally used as man regarded idols as God. When it was previously used to bring two different gendered beings to become one flesh as sexual beings in a union that naturally results in procreation, the arousal of sexual passions is now used outside of marriage.

Evil use outside marriage is fornication and adultery. Furthermore, because of the persistence of humanity to sin, God gave humanity over to the resultant consequences when all sorts of sins result from this disordered sexuality. Even when what was unnatural became natural for human sexuality such as lesbianism, homosexuality and bestiality (Rom 1:24; 26-27).

The arousal of sexual passions became so disordered that even Christians were enjoined to be careful in their marriage to fulfill their conjugal duty to each other so that Satan will not tempt them because of their lack of self-control. In apostolic times marriage is seen as God's Law to prevent further evil from resulting (1 Cor 7:1-9). Apostle Paul's exhortation to remain single though not from the Lord is an example to us of the extent that disordered sexuality had so affected God's original intention for marriage; such that it became preferable if one can stay single and not sin sexually¹⁰. Even Christ recognized that marriage, as divinely intended is no longer the only status¹¹ of human sexuality in a disordered world (Matt 19:10-12). In this case, living in a world that is so disordered, the Church is called to redeem human sexuality by proclaiming and hearing God's word as Law and Gospel.

6. DIVINE INTENTIONS 1 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVINE DESIGN FOR HUMANITY

6.1 Equal Standing¹² of Male and Female before God

⁹ Peter Lockwood, "Understanding Sexuality – Male and Female in the Image of God," *SEANOLT* (January 2010): 3. *Sensus plenior* means "the plain meaning of the text."

¹⁰ "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am" (1 Cor 7:8).

¹¹ "Status" is used to mean the marital status of either being married or single, there is no qualitative value attached to either status. This is the same meaning of the word used under section VII, D: Singlehood.

¹² "Standing" is used to mean our position before God (*coram deo*).

From the creation account of Genesis chapters one and two we see that both male and female are created in the “image of God” and so have the same standing before Him. Both male and female are given the same mandate to be “fruitful and multiply” and to “rule the earth”. One is not better nor superior than the other. Paul says in Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The Lutheran Study Bible explains that, “Ethnic, social, and sexual identities do not determine one’s standing before God. All who are baptized into Christ are one in His Body, even while distinctions present in creation remains.”¹³

6.2 Stewards of God’s World as Male and Female

When God called and commissioned humanity to dress, till and keep the earth, and have dominion over it, it was given to both male and female (Gen 1:26-28). God entrusted the care for His creation to both sexes, and so expected that each would bring his or her particular gifts to this calling – this was, and is, God’s design, the world would be blessed by the care of male and female. This includes care for the environment, for society and for family. This highlights the importance that as male and female we are to use our complimentary gifts to serve God by serving one another and all creation, and not abuse it for our selfish purposes.¹⁴

6.3 Sexuality as God’s Gift to Humanity

In a world that is obsessed with sex, the reactionary response is often to see sex as dirty and as a root of many evils. The creation event highlights the point that sex is good because God made humans sexual, not just for procreation but also to build intimate and pleasurable relationships.

For Lockwood, sexuality is God’s intentional good gift to men and women, and not an accidental by-product of the creation of the world. The creation of Eve is portrayed as a surprise gift for Adam where God playfully puts Adam to sleep as if a friend telling another friend to close his eyes before the surprise gift is placed in front of him. Like a father who on the day of the marriage hands over his daughter to the groom, God too leaves both man and woman to know and find pleasure in each other’s company.

6.3.1 Through human sexuality God creates marriage, an exclusive lifelong partnership for procreation, care and redemption of the world that God has made.

God created humans as male and female and it is his idea that a man should not be alone but to have a partner for the procreation of its own kind and for the care of his creation. Therefore God institutes marriage and it is the coming together of one man and one woman, joined together as one flesh to fulfill God’s mandate and desire. Though in the Scriptures we have heroes of faith who took more

¹³ Ed. Edward A. Engelbrecht, The Lutheran Study Bible. (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 2008.

¹⁴ Peter Lockwood, “Understanding Sexuality – Male and Female in the Image of God,” *SEANOLT* (January 2010): 5-6.

than one wife and Moses allowed divorce under certain stipulation, Jesus makes it very clear that according to divine design, marriage is an exclusive lifelong relationship of one man and one woman (Matthew 19:3-12). In Malachi 2:16, God says, “I hate divorce”.

6.3.2 Through our sexuality God creates community, an antidote for aloneness.

The God of the Scriptures is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And just as the three persons of the Godhead relate to each other, we who are made in his image are also created as relational beings. In Genesis chapters one and two, God’s recurrent comment of his creation is “good” except when it comes to the aloneness of Adam. So, just as all three persons of the Holy Trinity exist in perpetual communion with each other, we who bear his image are also created for communion and fellowship with one another.

Human beings were designed to live and thrive in community. God made us interdependent. We find fulfillment, significance, identity, and well being in the context of community. In the Divine Service we see that God’s will is to *gather* us into His presence as an assembled community of unique individuals, complete with our sexuality and gifts, to receive His Word and Sacraments, and respond in prayer and praise. God-pleasing and healthy male and female relationships are expressed at all levels of life: between mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister and many others. Such relationships as male and female are also expressed outside the immediate family where one shows parental love to orphans or compassion to someone in need.

7. DIVINE INTENTIONS 2 – SEXUALITY ISSUES FACING THE SINGAPOREAN CHRISTIAN

7.1 Male and Female Relations Other Than In Marriage.

7.1.1 Recognising Sexuality within Relationships.

We recognise that sexuality exists in relationships other than marital ones. It exists also for example between colleagues, friends, and family members. There is nothing wrong with sexuality *per se*, but we recognise that it has been disordered as a result of sin. As such we should exercise due care and caution in our words, actions, expressions and behaviour in these relationships with the opposite sex so that they are not misinterpreted, thus resulting in inappropriate responses and emotions.

7.1.2 Respect and Purity within Relationships

As Lutherans, we recognise that a Christian is at the same time a righteous man and a sinner (*simul justus et peccator*) and have inclination to actual sin (concupiscence).¹⁵ Therefore we need to be vigilant so that we may not be involved in immoral or extra marital affairs. The Bible admonished that we let “the marriage bed be undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4b). Sexual appetites also need to be controlled and disciplined (1 Corinthians 7:9).

7.2 Marriage and Remarriage

¹⁵ Ap, 2:25-26.

7.2.1 Divorce is not God's will.

Divorce is contrary to God's will (Matthew 19:6). Husband and wife are to live together in marriage until they are separated by death. Repentance and confession are important if divorce happens.

7.2.2 Marital Union.

The marital union is described in the scriptures as a oneness of two persons, created not merely by human choice but also by divine institution. Therefore, those who enter marriage are bound together not only in a horizontal relationship with each other by their pledge of faithfulness, but also by a mutual pledge to God their Creator to remain faithful (Malachi 2:15). The Law of God uncovers sins and guards against immorality, reveals what is unclean in the heart of man (Matthew 15:17-20). While the Law gives a diagnosis of the outward problem, the root of the divorce problem is a spiritual one, a failure to fear, love and trust in God. This also means that both parties need to examine themselves to see where they have failed each other in their relationship in the light of God's Law. Repentance therefore is necessary for restoration.

7.2.3 Exceptions

Failure of a marriage does not necessitate divorce. The exception clauses for divorce cited in scriptures (e.g. Matthew 5:32; 19:9) do not constitute prescriptions whereby a marriage may be terminated. Every effort should be made towards reconciliation. The exception clauses are not legislating grounds for divorce. They are merely mitigating the accompanying evils and precluding abuse of divorce.

7.2.4 Left hand rule: Law

Since marriage belongs to the left hand rule of God, scriptures in many places indicated that divorce and remarriage were *allowed*, consistent with God's left hand rule of preserving society from further degeneration due to "hardness of heart" (Mark 10:5) and greater evil.

7.2.5 Right hand rule: Gospel.

The church in its Gospel ministry operates under the right hand rule of God in mercy and forgiveness. The divorced and or remarried needs God's mercy and forgiveness, just as much as all of us sinners do. They should not be stigmatized as being greater sinners (John 8:1-11). The church therefore is to faithfully proclaim the Gospel promise of forgiveness of sins and Christ's work of redemption to bring them back under God's ownership and mercy, even in the face of sufferings, pains, broken relationships and disruptions to normal lives.

7.3 Homosexuality

We are in agreement with the position of the National Council of Churches Singapore that the practice of homosexuality is clearly incompatible with the teachings of the Christian faith.¹⁶ Therefore, we do not condone homosexual practice and we consider homosexual lifestyle as sinful

¹⁶ National Council of Churches of Singapore, Statement on Homosexuality dated 29 July 2003

and unacceptable. However, this does not mean that we reject or despise homosexuals. We acknowledge that every person is loved by God and we all live under the grace of God. Homosexuals¹⁷ should be regarded and treated no less as persons of worth and dignity.

The Biblical basis for our position on homosexuality is as follows¹⁸:

7.3.1 The male-female order of creation and its implications.

Any biblical discussion on human sexuality cannot side step the fact, and the context, that God made humanity “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). It is valid to observe that human beings are created for “trusting relationships”¹⁹ with each other, but it is *not* valid to regard such “trusting relationships”²⁰ as alluding to, or sanctioning, same-gender marriage. When it comes to marriage, the creative order and will of God is *always* and *only* male and female. God made a woman as the “helper fit for [the man]”, the man delighted in the “woman”, and God united them and made them “one flesh” (Gen. 2:20b-24). Marriage is therefore *not* the “appropriate term”²¹ to use in support of “same-gender couples entering into lifelong monogamous relationships.”²² If anything, same-gender marriages destroy the very idea of marriage as God has intended, and which some seek to promote as “the appropriate term”²³ and support structure for same-gender couples.

7.3.2 Procreation is a significant matter in the male-female creation order.

A primary purpose and blessing for marriage is to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Same-gender couples can never fulfill this purpose and have never been blessed for this purpose. In fact, more than any other manifestation of human distortion of God’s design and will, same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships threaten this purpose and blessing of God. This is acutely felt in Singapore. It is a matter of public knowledge and grave political concern that Singaporeans are slow to marry and even slower to replace themselves, with a birth rate of 1.16 children per married couple out of the replacement rate of 2.1.²⁴

7.3.3 Same-gender marriage is sin.

Terming it as “same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships” does not make a difference. Homosexuality, like all other manifestations of human depravity, is sin. Romans 1:18-27 is especially clear on this point. Here the Apostle Paul spoke of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18). Homosexuality was

¹⁷ Homosexuals are persons who have homosexual inclinations but not necessarily practicing it.

¹⁸ Adapted from response paper to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on its adoption of its statement on Human Sexuality on 19th August 2009, and its impact on Ministry Policies presented by Rev. Soh Guan Kheng to the LCS Ministerium on 3 October 2011. See Appendix.

¹⁹ Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, 14.

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality.aspx> (accessed 1st April 2012).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 18.

²² Ibid, 18.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Channel News Asia, 17 Jan. 2011, “Singapore Fertility Rate Falls to Record Low.”

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1105160/1/.html> (assessed on 1 April 2012).

listed right after idolatry as a very clear example of rebellion against God and His will (Rom. 1:22-26). Paul spoke of the natural relations between men and women being exchanged for unnatural relations between women and women, and shameless acts between men and men. Paul termed all of these as “dishonorable passions” before God (Rom. 1:26-27). It is significant to note that Paul did not use the term “homosexuals” here, but spoke of “natural relations” being exchanged for those “contrary to nature.” This broader description used by Paul can reasonably include what has been called same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships. It is sin.

7.3.4 Pastoral attitude and action.

The assertion that homosexuality is sin does not mean that we consider homosexuality as a worse sin than other sins, or that homosexuals are worse sinners than others. Like every other sin, homosexuality is an expression and evidence of original sin²⁵ and human depravity.²⁶ All sins and sinners are equally condemned by the Lord, all are under his wrath and judgment: “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one;’ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:10, 23).

We acknowledge that many sins can have equally destructive consequences: simple dishonesty and greed can lead to the downfall of large corporations and ruin the livelihoods of many; problem gambling has brought many families into crisis. In the same way, homosexuality has negative consequences in some areas more than others. It contradicts God’s creation order of male and female and its related commands to “be fruitful and multiply”, and “You shall not commit adultery”. As such, it is particularly detrimental to the survival and the moral mores of society, which are guarded by these commands.

But in as much as the law of God unapologetically exposes and utterly condemns sin, the Gospel of God promises his unimpeded forgiveness of sins and unfettered freedom to live out God’s will in Christ. Therefore, in the light of the Gospel, homosexuals are to be accorded every dignity, respect, fellowship and opportunity as any other persons in the church. We recognize that homosexuals can be gifted as any other persons, and may be called upon to serve in as many capacities as any other persons in the church. However, just as anyone who refuses to admit and repent of sin compromises his own capacity and opportunity for service, unrepentant homosexuals inevitably subject themselves to church discipline and pastoral counsel, which aim to win over a sister and a brother (Matt 18:15b).

A pastor shall regard unrepentant homosexuals with love and respect, ensure confidentiality, and encourage the rejection of sin and true repentance which will include abstinence and self-control on the part of the homosexuals, out of love for God and neighbour. The Lord’s Supper shall be regarded as a source of forgiveness and grace, which will enable true repentance and empower sinners to amend their lives. Unless it is regarded that a homosexual has himself broken fellowship with the church by his unrepentance, he should be admitted to the Lord’s Table. A pastor shall also

²⁵ Epit. I:21

²⁶ Refer to Section V, “The Fall and Sexuality.”

seek to teach the congregation to love the neighbor who struggles with homosexuality, form appropriate support groups that will encourage, include and pray for him, so that he may experience God's life changing power through Word and Sacrament, and faith active in love.

7.4 Transgenderism

A transgender person has a defined sex but experiences their gender identity to be at odds with that sex (sometimes called 'assigned sex'). Some transgender people operate within the binary model of 'male' or 'female' but are convinced they are the opposite sex to their body and want to modify their body to agree with their gender. Such people often identify as transsexuals.

A male-to-female transsexual is someone whose sexual biology is male but who is convinced they are a female. Conversely, a female-to-male transsexual is someone whose sexual biology is female but who is convinced they are a male.

Some transgender people reject the traditional binary model and identify as another gender: neutrois, neutral or null gender; genderfluid; genderqueer; two-spirit; intergender; pangender; trigender. They, too, have a disjunction between their embodied sex and their internal, subjective convictions about their self.¹

There is another category of transgender people. They are intersex. There are a small number of people who are born with conditions in which their physical and sexual features do not reflect the regular binary structure (Disorders of Sex Development or intersex). The prevalence of DSD is challenging to determine because it covers a wide range of conditions, some of which are not obvious until a person has a medical investigation.

They would have genitalia of both sexes. There is no medical consensus on the treatment of many intersex conditions. In this case, they are unsure of their gender not because of a subjective self-understanding but because of the inconclusive biological conditions and experiences. Doctors and even psychiatrists are suggesting that time be given for their bodies and hormones to stabilise so that a more definitive gender can be identified. We need to show compassion and a clear awareness of the pain and struggles of intersex people, with a straightforward theological approach focussing on redemption in Christ.

We saw that in Genesis 1:27, "male and female He created them," affirming that God designed humanity as sexually dimorphic, with male and female representing the two distinct biological categories. We understand both transgenderism and intersex conditions as

¹ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is one of the standard diagnostic guides for mental health professionals. The fifth and latest edition was published in 2013. DSM is the classification system used in the US and much of Australia; the International Classification of Disease (ICD) classifications are used in Europe and the United Kingdom. The latest editions of both are seeking uniformity in their coding. Note that many Australian hospitals use ICD so they can include all diseases, not just mental illness, in their patient assessments. ICD-11 uses "gender incongruence", and DSM-5 uses "gender dysphoria" to replace "transgender". We retain "transgender" as it is still the term in theological literature.

consequences of the Fall, not as part of God's original creation. This theological paper uses "transgender" to refer to both categories.

7.4.1 Theological Standpoint on Transgenderism

We affirm the belief that human sexuality is part of God's intentional design, characterised by the creation of two distinct sexes: male and female. Transgenderism is viewed as incompatible with this biblical understanding.

1. **Divine Design and Creation:** According to Genesis 1:31, God created humanity in His image as male and female, and this design is deemed "very good." Sexuality is considered a gift from God, and any deviation, including transgenderism, is because of human fallenness and depravity.
2. **The Augsburg Confession Article XXVII** (Latin text) argues that marriage between a man and a woman is God's "creation and institution". This is the foundation for a proper human sexual relationship.²
3. **Human Dignity and Worth:** Despite theological disagreements with transgender practices, we emphasise that God loves transgender individuals and should be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion. They are considered persons of worth who live under God's grace.
4. **Marriage and Sexual Ethics:** The church reaffirms its commitment to traditional Christian sexual ethics, which include marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Transgender theologies are viewed as contradictory to these foundational beliefs. The modern transgender movement is seen as challenging the reality of two distinct sexes, potentially leading to significant consequences for individuals, families, and society.
5. **Ordination and Church Leadership:** We oppose the ordination of transgender individuals into clergy roles and the celebration of transgenderism as a gift from God. The church must stand firm in its teachings and not compromise on its theological convictions.
6. **Role of the Church:** The church is encouraged to continue proclaiming the truth of God's design for sexuality and gender, offering guidance and teaching based on biblical principles. This includes opposing cultural trends that seek to redefine or dismantle traditional understandings of gender and sexuality.

² "Moreover, this is the command of God [1 Cor. 7:2*]: "Because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife." Not only God's command, but also God's creation and institution [emphasis] drive those into marriage who, apart from a special work of God, are not exempted according to Genesis 2[:18*]: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Consequently, those who comply with this command and institution of God [emphasis] do not sin." Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 85.

7.4.2. Pastoral Care and Attitudes

Recognising the complexities and personal struggles associated with transgenderism, we provide guidelines for pastors on how to minister to transgender individuals in a manner consistent with Christian teachings.

1. **Law and Gospel Distinction:** Pastors are instructed to uphold the distinction between Law and Gospel when dealing with transgender persons. This means convicting individuals of sin through the Law while offering forgiveness and hope through the Gospel. The example of Jesus' compassion towards the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) is cited as a model for pastoral care.
2. **Compassionate Engagement:** Pastors are encouraged to avoid condemnatory language or attitudes. Instead, they should approach transgender individuals with humility, recognising their sinfulness. The goal is to offer God's forgiveness and support healing and transformation through Christ.
3. **Trust-Circle Approach:** This method involves building trust with transgender individuals. Pastors should communicate respectfully, listen empathetically, and offer counsel based on God's Word. The trust circle may include forming small support groups within the church to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the individual.
4. **Communication and Confidentiality:** Maintaining confidentiality is emphasised. Pastors should create a safe space for open dialogue, ensuring that transgender individuals feel heard and respected. This involves avoiding harsh judgments and sensitivity to the person's experiences and feelings.
5. **Avoidance of Coercive Methods:** We clarify that our approach is not akin to "conversion therapy," which may involve coercive or harmful practices. Instead, the focus is on loving persuasion, biblical teaching, and spiritual support without force or psychological manipulation.

7.4.3. Practical Scenarios and Pastoral Actions

We provide practical examples to guide pastors in real-life situations involving transgender individuals within the church community.

Scenario 1: Participation in Church Activities

A transgender church member wishes to join the choir. Pastors should consider:

- ☐ Whether the individual is repentant and willing to follow pastoral advice, including counselling.
- ☐ If they are willing to present themselves in alignment with their biological sex (e.g., refraining from cross-dressing).
- ☐ The readiness of the choir and congregation to accept and support the individual.
- ☐ The suitability of leadership roles based on the person's alignment with church teachings.

Scenario 2: Transgender Individuals Seeking Inclusion

1. Continuing in Perceived Gender: For those wishing to live as their perceived gender, pastors should:

- ☐ Show respect and welcome them as any other visitor.
- ☐ Engage in open conversations about biblical views on sexuality without compromising theological convictions.
- ☐ Encourage repentance and, if necessary, consider church discipline compassionately if the individual remains unrepentant.
- ☐ Provide support groups to foster genuine Christian friendship and care.

2. Desiring to Return to Birth-Assigned Gender: For those seeking to detransition: ☐

- ☐ Affirm their desire to align with their biological sex.
- ☐ Offer counselling and possibly partner with professionals to assist in the process.
- ☐ Provide support to their families.
- ☐ Utilize pastoral resources like individual confession and absolution to encourage repentance and assure them of Christ's forgiveness.

Scenario 3: Cross-Dressing Attendees

When a transgender person who cross-dresses attends church services:

- ☐ Show them respect and treat them with the usual courtesy.
- ☐ If appropriate, privately and respectfully encourage them to refrain from cross-dressing during future visits.
- ☐ For members, assess their willingness to align with biblical teachings and offer ongoing counsel.
- ☐ Emphasize that refraining from cross-dressing is consistent with repentance and living according to Scripture.

7.4.4 Response to Conversion Therapy Allegations

We address concerns about being associated with "conversion therapy," which is often criticised for involving coercive or harmful methods aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

1. Distinction from Conversion Therapy:

- ☐ Non-Coercive Methods: The church's approach relies solely on respectful communication, biblical counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a clear rejection of any use of physical violence, psychological manipulation, or coercion.
- ☐ Focus on Persuasion and Love: The goal is to persuade individuals through the love of Christ and the truth of Scripture, not to force change upon them. The church emphasises the importance of free will and personal conviction in repentance and transformation.
- ☐ Legal and Ethical Considerations: We note that while conversion therapy bans aim to prevent harmful practices, the church's approach does not fall under such definitions. The pastoral care is meant to be compassionate, voluntary, and respectful of individual rights.

7.4.5. Role of Families and Parental Guidance

1. Raising Children in God's Design: We encourage parents to guide their children to embrace their biological sex lovingly. This involves raising sons and daughters to accept and appreciate their masculinity or femininity as good gifts from God.
2. Responding to Societal Trends: Acknowledging the growing trend of parents raising children without a designated gender or encouraging gender transition, the church urges Christian parents to uphold biblical teachings in nurturing their children's understanding of gender and sexuality.
3. Support for Families: Pastors are advised to provide counsel and support not only to transgender individuals but also to their families, recognising that family members may experience fear, anxiety, or confusion. The church community is encouraged to provide comfort and guidance for families navigating these challenges.

7.4.6. Emphasis on Christ's Forgiveness and Grace

1. Centrality of Christ: Pastoral care aims to lead individuals to Christ, who offers forgiveness, healing, and the power to live according to God's will.
2. Sacraments as Means of Grace: Baptism and Holy Communion are highlighted as vital practices that convey God's grace, strengthen faith, and empower individuals to resist sin. Transgender individuals are encouraged to participate in these sacraments unless they openly reject the church's teachings and remain unrepentant.

3. **Role of Confession and Absolution:** Pastors are encouraged to utilise the orders of individual confession and absolution to facilitate repentance and assure individuals of God's forgiveness. This practice is seen to support transgender persons in their spiritual journey and commitment to live according to biblical teachings.
4. **Community Support:** The church community is called to embody Christ's love, offering support, prayer, and fellowship to those struggling with transgenderism. This reflects the belief that transformation occurs within a loving and supportive faith community.

7.4.7. Pastoral Self-Care and Support

1. **Pastoral Vulnerability:** Recognizing the complexities involved in ministering to transgender individuals, pastors are advised to acknowledge their inadequacies and vulnerabilities.
2. **Building Support Networks:** Pastors are encouraged to seek counsel and support (such as the bishop and fellow pastors). Keeping church councils informed and consulting with Christian professionals are recommended practices.
3. **Training and Preparation:** Pastors may form support groups within the church, consisting of trained lay leaders with a burden to minister to transgender persons. Familiarity with the church's theological position and skills training are emphasised to ensure appropriate and effective ministry.

7.4.8. Legal and Societal Considerations

1. **Understanding Conversion Therapy Legislation:** We acknowledge the concerns raised by the LGBTQ+ community regarding conversion therapy and note the government's position on the matter.³
2. **Navigating Legal Boundaries:** We know that pastoral care practices can be misconstrued as conversion therapy, but we clarify that its methods are pastoral and not coercive. The focus is on voluntary engagement, respect for individual autonomy, and adherence to legal and ethical standards.

³ MOH, News Highlights: "Government's Stance on Changing One's Sexual Orientation Through 'Conversion Therapy'", 4th May 2020, accessed 5th Oct 2024. <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/government's-stance-on-changing-one's-sexual-orientation-through-conversion-therapy>

3. **Advocacy for Religious Freedom:** We suggest that overly broad definitions of conversion therapy may impinge upon religious freedoms, particularly the right to express and practice deeply held theological convictions. The church advocates for the ability to offer pastoral care in a manner consistent with its beliefs while respecting the rights of individuals.

7.4.9 Conclusion

We present a framework that upholds traditional Christian teachings on gender and sexuality while advocating for a pastoral approach that is compassionate, respectful, and grounded in biblical truth. Transgender individuals are to be treated with dignity and love, receiving guidance and support aimed at leading them towards repentance and life aligned with God's design. The church seeks to balance adherence to its theological convictions with a sincere commitment to ministering to all individuals in the spirit of Christ's love and mercy.

By emphasising the importance of building trust, offering compassionate counsel, and providing community support, the church aims to be a place where individuals struggling with transgenderism can find hope, healing, and transformation through the power of the Gospel.

D. Singlehood.

Singlehood (celibacy) was not in God's intention when he created human beings. After the Fall, marriage remains good as God's gift, but singlehood (celibacy) is also God's gift of vocation (Matt 19:12); but without the gift, remaining unmarried can sometimes be the better of two evils due to extreme circumstances (such as war/famine/disasters/extreme nature of one's vocation), which may not be conducive for one to be married and to raise a family. This is why Paul chooses singlehood due to the extreme circumstances of his time (1 Cor 7:26-38).

Being single is to remain chaste and to abstain from sexual immorality. This standard is equal to the standard of purity for those who are called to the married life. However, when one realizes that one is not able to be chaste in the body and in spirit; one should give up singlehood (celibacy) and get married (rather than to burn with passion as Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 7:9). A vow taken towards singlehood (celibacy) can be broken when one discovers that one is not gifted for it²⁷. Christ says that singlehood is not for everyone except for those who are given this gift (Matt 19:11). Therefore, singlehood (celibacy) is a temporary situation for most people and when singles that do not have the gift of singlehood (celibacy) do not get married for whatever reasons, they should be provided proper counsel and guidance by the church.

In a fallen world, the status²⁸ of singlehood (celibacy) just as the status of marriage is to be used for the good of God's kingdom. Therefore singles should devote their attention to how

²⁷ Smallclad III:11; Ap 23; in LW 48:285, Luther wrote: "I am absolutely convinced that it is impossible to prove from Scripture, either from a law or by an example, that chastity can be classified as a vow."

²⁸ Refer to footnote 11.

to use this particular calling to minister in situations where they will be more available due to their single status compared to those who are married.

As people in society tend to marry late in life now, singlehood becomes a prolonged state of one's sexuality, therefore it is important for the church to guide and help singles live responsibly and learn how to deal with their sexual desires, urges and temptations and remain chaste. When Christian singles desire to live together in community with other singles, whether they have the gift or when it is a temporal situation; they need to be aware of the call to chastity and singular devotion to Christ. Therefore all forms of co-habitation between singles of the opposite sex must be disallowed (such as singles living together and sharing a single bed; sharing a single room during vacations; entering and staying in dormitory rooms without accountability...etc.) to avoid falling into temptation and to preserving a good Christian witness before the world.

VIII. Conclusion

Human sexuality is an issue that affects every single human being, whether he or she is a Christian or not. In his divine love and will, God has chosen to create us as male and female. This paper provides a brief but broad and biblical view of human sexuality. In essence, being male and female is by the divine design of our Creator, and this must guide our view of God's intentions of how our God-given sexuality is to be understood and expressed in the fabric of human life and relationships. This is the position held by the Lutheran Church in Singapore.

We face many issues today in the area of human sexuality. We have presented what we believe are the key ones. It is hoped that this paper will assist the Pastors of the Lutheran Church in Singapore in their teaching and counsel, and thereby lead many in the ways of godly wisdom, for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

APPENDIX:

A Response to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on its adoption of its statement on Human Sexuality on 19th August 2009, and its impact on Ministry Policies. (Presented by Rev. Soh Guan Kheng at the Ministerium of the LCS on 3rd October 2011)

With regard to the issue stated above, it is proposed that the LCS adopts the following statement:

1. The LCS acknowledges the letters from The Rev. Mark Hanson (Presiding Bishop, ELCA) and The Rev. Rafael Padilla (Global Mission Unit), dated 24th August 2009 and 28th August 2009. We appreciate their sincerity, clarity and openness in presenting their adoption of the social statement: *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*²⁹, as well as its Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies. We also appreciate their invitation to share our thoughts with them, and their assurance that they will respect the policies and practice of companion churches in the placement of personnel.
2. We acknowledge that the document in question, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” A Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church adopted August 19, 2009, (HSGT) is clear in its intention to provide a biblical, theological and sociological basis for the conclusion that “marriage is also the appropriate term to use in describing similar benefits, protection, and support for same-gender couples entering into lifelong monogamous relationships...that such accountable relationships also provide the necessary foundation that supports trust and familial and community thriving”³⁰
3. The HSGT is therefore also the basis for the ELCA’s resolutions at its Churchwide Assembly on 19th August 2009 to, among other resolutions, “commit itself” to:
 - a. “finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships”, and,
 - b. “finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.”
4. In the spirit of Christian love to the ELCA, which is both pioneer, and partner of the LCS, we now offer our brief response to the HSGT and the resolutions based upon it.

²⁹ From now on HSGT.

³⁰ HSGT, 10.

5. We first offer our understanding of the HSGT's central argument: that because God created human beings "for trusting relationships with each other",³¹ and because "Christ-like love for the neighbor informs all our activities, sexual and otherwise,"³² therefore the God-created, greatest, and socially and legally supported human trust relationship of marriage should also apply to same-gender couples.
6. With respect, on the basis of scripture, we regret that we do not agree with this position. On the HSGT's interpretation of scripture, we note that three fundamental contextual points were insufficiently considered.
7. First, on the matter of the *male-female order of creation and implications*. Any biblical discussion on human sexuality cannot side-step the fact, and the context, that God made humanity "male and female" (Gen 1:27). It is valid to observe that human beings are created for trusting relationships with each other, but it is *not* valid to regard such "trusting relationships" as alluding to, or sanctioning, same-gender marriage. When it comes to marriage, the creative order and will of God is *always* and *only* male and female. God made a woman as the "suitable helper" for the man, the man delighted in the "woman", and God united them and made them "one flesh" (Gen 2:20b-24). Marriage is therefore *not* "the suitable term to use" in support of "same-gender couples entering into lifelong monogamous relationships." If anything, same-gender marriage goes against the very idea of marriage as God intended, and which HSGT seeks to promote as "the appropriate term" and support structure for same-gender couples.
8. Second, on the matter of *procreation*. Procreation is a significant matter in the male-female creation order. A primary purpose and blessing for marriage is to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen. 1:28). Same-gender couples can never fulfill this purpose and have never been blessed for this purpose. In fact, more than any other manifestation of human distortion of God's design and will, same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships threaten this purpose and blessing of God. The very survival of the human race is at stake! This is acutely felt in the Singaporean context. It is a matter of public knowledge and grave political concern that Singaporeans are slow to marry and even slower to replace themselves, with a birthrate of 1.2 children per married couple. On this matter alone, the impact of sanctioning same-gender marriages in Singapore would be unthinkable!
9. Third, on the matter of the admission that same-gender marriage is *sin*. Terming it as "same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships" does not make a difference. Homosexuality, like all other manifestations of human depravity, is sin. Romans 1:18-27 is especially clear on this point. Here the Apostle Paul spoke of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18). Homosexuality was listed right after idolatry as a very clear example of rebellion against God and His will (Rom 1:22-26). Paul spoke of the natural relations between men and women being exchanged for unnatural relations of women and

³¹ HSGT, 4.

³² Ibid.

women, and shameless acts between men and men. Paul termed all of these as “dishonorable passions” before God (Rom 1:26-27). It is significant to note that Paul did not use the term “homosexuals” here, but spoke of “natural relations” being exchanged for those “contrary to nature.” This broader description used by Paul can reasonably include what has been called “same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships.” In God’s eyes, it is sin.³³

10. When interpreting the sixth commandment, you shall not commit adultery; the HSGT explains this sin as “Promiscuity and sexual activity without a spirit of mutuality and commitment”, and “The breakdown of trust through the sexual adulteration of the bonds of the committed, intimate, and protected relationship of marriage.”³⁴ The entire explanation seems to miss the immediate reference, which is, the male-female, husband-wife, spousal relationship, which excludes same-gender marriages. Same-gender marriages would be understood as “dishonorable passions” (Rom. 1:26), and would be prohibited by this commandment as sexual impurity.
11. On the Lutheran understanding and use of law and gospel, we fear that such interpretation of the law diminishes the law. As Lockwood³⁵ states: “If we diminish the law that exposes our sin, we diminish the gospel.” In leading up to this point, Lockwood quoted Gerhard Forde from Forde’s 23rd February 1994 address at Luther Seminary, Apostle Paul, Minnesota, on ‘The normative character of scripture for matters of faith and life: human sexuality in light of Romans 1:16-32. In explaining Romans 3:31 Forde said:

*“If Christ is the end of the law to those of faith, do we by that faith render the law useless? “Absolutely not”, says Paul. On the contrary, we set the law in place, we establish its rightful place and its true authority... Because we are justified by faith, there is now neither any need for nor point to changing it, toning it down, ...or erasing it (Forde, 308, 309).”*³⁶

12. Thus, the law is needed to show the true blackness of our sin, so that we may know the true brightness of the gospel, for the gospel is essentially the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and not an ethics of downplaying sin and sidestepping God’s creation order.
13. Braaten critiques a draft of a “Statement on Human Sexuality” precisely on its use of law and gospel:

“It fails utterly to observe the proper distinction between creation and redemption, law and gospel. The Statement improperly builds the ethics of sex on the gospel of the incarnation and justification by faith alone, the twin pillars of the Christian doctrine of salvation. Lutheran theological ethics is based on the law of God, which comes to us through two channels, through

³³ Refer to “A Brief Excursus on the Pastoral Attitude and Action Towards Homosexuality and Homosexuals.”

³⁴ HSGT, 5

³⁵ Greg Lockwood, “Same Sex Marriage – A Study of the Biblical Teaching and an Reflection on the Current Theological Standpoints in the Global Debate”, *SEANOLT* (January 2010):72. Hereafter: “Same Sex Marriage.”

³⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

the Bible and through the structures of creation.... When God created the world and human beings, he designed all things to obey certain laws. To ignore the law of God and to replace it with the gospel is pure antinomianism, something which Luther condemned when it reared its ugly head among some of his closest disciples.”³⁷

14. We are concerned that the HSGT may be ignoring and diminishing the law with regard to same-gender marriages/trusting lifelong monogamous relationships, and thus diminish the very gospel we all seek to uphold with equal fervor.
15. We appreciate the HSGT’s clear and fair articulation of four possible positions that could be held by other churches and Christians “with conviction and integrity.” Based on the reasons presented above, the LCS is in accord with the first position:
16. “On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law. They believe same-gender sexual behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. They therefore conclude that the neighbor and the community are best served by calling people in same-gender sexual relationships to repentance for that behavior and to a celibate lifestyle. Such decisions are intended to be accompanied by pastoral response and community support.”³⁸
17. In view of this conclusion, this Ministerium of the LCS recommends the following response to the ELCA:
 - a. That we endorse the actions stated by our Bishop, The Right Reverend Terry Kee, in his letter to the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, The Reverend Mark Hanson, dated in September 2010. He expressed his regret over the action taken by the General Assembly of August 2010 as expressed in the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. In view of the differences in conviction on the above issue, the preaching and teaching platforms will no longer be automatically extended to pastors and missionaries of ELCA, rather it will be on a person to person basis.
 - b. That, in deep gratitude to God and to the ELCA for its pioneering work which contributed immensely to the establishment of the LCS, and its many years of generous, loving and fruitful partnership, that we remain in partnership with the ELCA. We pray that in Christian love and the bonds of our Lutheran community, we will be able to work together, sharpen one another, and bear the fruit of faith and the gospel we treasure to the glory of our Lord.

Writers:

³⁷ Braaten, Carl E. “Theological Issues Challenging the ELCA.” (An address given at La Casa De Cristo Lutheran Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, sponsored by the Lutheran Coalition for Reform (CORE), October 14, 2008, pg. 8).

³⁸ HSGT, 11.

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