

Free In Christ to Serve Our Neighbor

A Leader's Resource to Accompany the ELCA Study Part 3

Introduction

The ELCA Task Force on Sexuality is providing this third study because prominent aspects of Christian social concerns relating to human sexuality have not yet been discussed in depth. This study continues but does not duplicate the work of Journey Together Faithfully, Parts 1 and 2. It is important to note:

1. Matters specific to homosexuality will not be a prominent theme in this third study
2. The Task Force asks that each congregation engage a broad a spectrum of ages in this study
3. The study insists that Christian freedom in regards to sexuality is a matter open for debate, but is not essential to our salvation or the Gospel message.
4. This study does not presume to be comprehensive.

Resources: In the back of the study booklet, pages 81-136

Sessions: Eight study sessions

Response Form: Completed and returned to the ELCA task force by November 1, 2007.

The Study is in Liturgical Format: Gathering, Hearing the Word, Considering the Word, Responding to the Word and World, and Closing.

Suggested Format for 50-60 minute sessions

Opening hymn and prayer, Galatians reading and discernment	10 minutes
Vignette(s) to put a face on topic	10 minutes
Summaries of reflections on key biblical and theological resources along with accompanying questions and discussion for each summary	20-25 minutes
Comparing multiple viewpoints -- closing prayer	10 minutes

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul declares, "In Christ Jesus....the only thing that counts is faith working through love." These words will guide your reading, reflecting, listening and conversation.

A Leader's Guide is on Pages 77-80 of the study book. Here you will find some general guidelines such as room set up and hymn selections.

Leading the Sessions: Establish ground rules for each session:

- Listen with open ears and hearts
- Allow everyone to speak before speaking a second time.
- Limit your insights, so that all who wish to speak, can.
- Use an icon or religious symbol or another object such as a stuffed animal to focus the conversation and it can be passed around. The object can be used to reinforce the idea that only one person should speak at a time.

Goals of the ELCA Task Force:

- To be faithful to the church's call and produce an honest and faithful outcome.
- To discuss tough issues without undue division.
- To grow in our understanding of the bible and its interpretation
- To engage all generations
- To grow in comprehensive understanding of sexuality in all its dimensions
- To chart and celebrate common ground wherever possible

Christian Foundations for Deliberation Session 1

Gathering

As people gather, ask “What is your name? What area of the United States did you grow up?

What one thing do you remember about that place?”

Hymn and prayer on page 9 of study book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 1:1-10

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to the Word and World

Foundations:

It is important that we agree on ground rules governing this 8-session study. We are called to listen and speak with humility and openness, recognizing that we come to this study as sinful but redeemed mortals created by God and receivers of God’s saving grace through faith alone.

Listening to God in Scripture

1. We seek not our own opinions and thoughts, but how God would have us live. We begin with our relationship to God revealed in the Bible, and with the wisdom of the heart that comes from fearing, loving, and trusting God.

2. We have a Lutheran understanding of Scripture

a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God

b. Written Scripture bears witness to Christ (the manger of Christ—Luther)

3. Lutherans read the Bible through the lens of Christ for the sake of the world that God loves – which is a “gospel” way of interpreting

Lutherans believe that God’s law functions two ways: to order human activities that protect against harm and evil; and it reveals our brokenness in the light of God’s holiness.

4. While the letter of the law breaks through our pretenses, even “kills” us, the spirit of the risen Christ gives us life with the promise of life for the world.

Question: From what was just said, how do Lutherans understand Law and Gospel?

How can being clear about what these mean, guide our discussion?

Dwelling in Galatians

1. Galatians is Paul’s wisdom about how to view God’s law in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ

2. We are challenged by Scripture because God is not done with any of us and God reminds us in Isaiah 55:8 that “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”

3. Paul tells us that the purpose of Christian freedom is to bless the world and neighbor.

How do we as sexual beings live for the benefit of others?

We Listen for the Spirit as God’s Creatures

1. We are created to think about this world and act in a reasonable manner.

2. Knowledge gained from natural and social sciences are gifts of God.

We Listen to God as forgiven Sinners

1. Believing in Jesus is not about correct knowledge or human decision. It is brought about by the creative Word of forgiveness and new life that causes us to rely on God.
2. The saving gospel dismisses every effort to put ourselves in God's place.

We Listen to God in Freedom

1. We are free from the guilt of sin in order to serve Christ and our neighbor.
2. If our freedom does not bless our neighbor, it is only self-interest.
3. Lutherans are careful not to equate rights that make up our civic freedom with our freedom in Christ.
4. God's saving mercy for us extends to others as well.
5. Sexuality is a matter of human understanding, healthy practice and medical knowledge.
6. Even when we hold deeply contrary views on moral issues; questions of church and civil law are not necessarily church dividing. The church and its unity are grounded in the Gospel.

Question: What wisdom does our Lutheran theology provide regarding free will and making choices? How does this wisdom influence the way we deliberate together and the way we view our neighbor?

Question: How do civic freedoms differ from freedom in the Gospel? How do these understandings intersect?

Question: How is it possible to hold deeply contrary views and still remain together as one church?

We Look Ahead

1. We are invited to listen to God's Word and the Witness of the Spirit.
2. We are invited to listen to each other.
3. Session 2 will elaborate on Christian themes about sexuality.
4. Session 3 will show how we are all participants in various "cultures."
5. Sessions 4-7 introduce specific issues related to sexuality.
6. Session 8 will draw your experience and thoughts together so your group can communicate with the ELCA Task Force.

Question: What new insight or understanding have you gained from this session?

What questions were raised for you? What would you like to learn more about?

Closing:

Prayer and Dismissal on page 16 of the Study Book

Session 2

Gathering

As people gather ask: When you had questions about sexuality as a youth, who did you ask?

Why? Did you believe them?"

Hymn and prayer on page 17 in the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 1:11-2:10

Considering the Word

Silence

What do you hear? What do you hear god saying to us?

Responding to the Word and World

Vignette page 17-18 in study book

Question: What possible responses could the youth director offer to Abbey? Based on common

convictions of Christianity and Lutheran understanding of sexuality's goodness and brokenness,

what response should be given Abbey? How does this response illustrate an understanding of the good of the neighbor?

Setting the Context

1. Even though sexuality is part of God's good creation, some matters and practices are not viewed in a positive way, wWhat does the church have to say about these issues?
2. Among young people, worship attendance and church involvement seem to increase support for sexual abstinence before marriage.
3. The powerful influence of marketing and media offer obstacles to healthy understandings of sexuality. The primary value is "any pleasure that I choose is okay as long as it doesn't hurt someone else."
4. Our human experience is full of ambiguities.

Sexuality as part of God's good creation

1. God in Genesis declares that humans are very good, and that the body and sexuality are good as well.
2. During the First Century, A.D., and after, much of culture believed that the soul/mind are good while the body/flesh are evil.
3. Over the years Christian thinking moved toward the idea that sexual desires detract from religious/spiritual character.
4. This was reversed at the Reformation when the Lutheran Confessions affirmed sexuality as a part of the responsible vocation in a faithful life.

Distorted Sexuality

1. Predecessor Lutheran church statements have spelled out opposition to adultery, sexual abuse, promiscuity, prostitution, pornography and images of sexuality in the media.
2. Lutherans are urged to go deeper and consider sin in broader terms.
3. Sin is mistrust or misdirection of one's desires toward self-gratification or self-assertion at the expense of others.
4. Sin is pervasive and complex, therefore sexual activity within marriage is sinful if it is self-centered and does not express genuine love and respect of the spouse.

Laying the Groundwork for Deliberation

1. Lutheran theology illuminates the dual nature of human sexuality as both blessed and corrupted.
2. An evangelical ethic or approach considers:
 1. We are rooted in God's love in Christ
 2. We hold in tension "contemporary" and "traditional" thinking
 3. We acknowledge previous Lutheran Church teachings as primary sources for our current understanding.

Question: What would you add or subtract from these components? Why?

A Case Study from Luther and an Evangelical Approach to Discussing Sexuality

1. Read the case study on page 22 of the study book.
2. Luther appeals to Scripture, prior theology, natural law, reason and human experience.
3. To Luther and those around him, marriage was defined by intercourse and having children.
4. Luther's creativity is not a disregard for Biblical and Christian precedent, but a use of moral reasoning that preserves Christian principles, attends to the concrete realities of this neighbor and is creative in moral guidance.
5. Luther uses an anchored, yet flexible approach to address this situation of human brokenness with frankness and creativity rather than appealing only to Scripture's commands, or applying some list of moral prescriptions.
6. This approach asks: What serves the law of love?

Question: What did you think of Luther's advice to the woman? How did he reach his conclusions? Would this help you understand how to make similar decisions?

Common Christian convictions about Sexuality --Christian Tradition suggests that the purpose of sexual behavior is:

1. Procreation
2. Satisfaction of sexual desire
3. Expression of positive/intimate emotional relationship of love between partners.

The Context of these behaviors is

1. Marital commitment (permanent and exclusive)
2. Relationships are heterosexual with implied procreation.
3. Contemporary Christian Ethics gives much more emphasis to love as a norm and less to procreation.
4. Our Lutheran Heritage holds up three visions:
 - A. We can offer a vision for sexuality within Christian marriage that challenges today's negative or trivialized understandings of sexuality in marriage.
 - B. We can offer a more generalized vision of healthy human sexuality based in the understanding that God created a good world, including our bodies. Key principles, such as responsible love and care of oneself and others can be used as a basis for understanding one's own personal sexual identity.
 - C. It provides an approach for deliberation and moral evaluation, grounded in theological and scriptural tradition. We don't gloss over difficult issues with pat answers.

Question: How do you respond to the idea that moral laws or traditional norms may not always provide the most life-giving answer to the issue of sexuality? What about this concept do you find disturbing? Helpful?

Closing

Prayer and dismissal on Page 26 of the Study Book

Sexuality, Culture and Freedom Session 3

Gathering:

As people gather, ask: "From what you know of weddings in today's world, how do they differ from those a generation or two before?"

Prayer and hymn on Page 27 of Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 2:11-3:13

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to Word and World

Vignette on page 27-28 of Study Book

Ashley's Wedding

Question: Describe the various cultural lenses people used to draw conclusions regarding Ashley's wedding? Where do your own lenses come from? How do various people seem to be dealing with Ashley and Cody's living together before the wedding.

Harmon

Question: How do you suppose Harmon will vote on the bill? Why? Why do you suppose that

Harmon has never discussed his sister's situation with anyone at church?

Contemporary Context

1. Culture can be defined as the beliefs, values, customs, practices and social behavior of a particular group. Culture and its gifts are part of God's good creation.
2. We are members of several different cultures
 - A. As individuals we are part of a family unit, a work place and a congregation.
 - B. Congregations are affected by various cultural forces around them and by the individuals that make them up.
 - C. The ELCA is made up of many cultures that have shared commitments to Scripture, certain beliefs and practices.
3. We cannot escape the many cultures of our world and the forces of change. But we can view our social worlds and social practices of our time and place through the message of the Gospel.
4. We make sense of things by using cultural lenses, and not just one at a time, but many that are constantly changing. Social practices are never simply "the way things are."
5. In summary, we can and do view any matter related to sexuality through multiple cultural lenses, but as Christians, we also bring our "gospel" lenses.
6. As Christians:
 - A. We trust in a living God.
 - B. We believe in the liberating presence and work of the Holy Spirit.
 - C. We believe that the lens of the Gospel introduces us to a radical freedom to view cultural practices as either life-giving or harmful.

Question: What lenses have affected your own thinking and decisions regarding matters of sexuality? Has the gospel affected your thinking or your actions?

Reflections:

1. How do we discern which cultural practices regarding sexuality will help the neighbor to flourish and which are detrimental?
2. In Galatians, Paul declares that Christian freedom frees us from insisting upon religious and secular cultural practices that might hinder us from being Christ to the neighbor, to one another, to our spouses.
3. Part of the power of the freedom of the Christian is that it should lead us to search for truth in open and honest dialogue.

Common Ground

1. Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society
2. Not only God but sin is at work in the world
3. The church needs to constantly discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values and powers.

Three Possible Views of this Subject

1. I want the church to make it a priority to warn people of the dangers of the dominant culture and provide clear guidelines for Christian living, especially what constitutes appropriate sexual practices.
2. The church should protect any persons who may be victimized or hurt, but it does not need to obsess about sexual morality. That is primarily an individual's choice.
3. The church should focus on providing its members with spiritual guidance and thoughtful education regarding sexuality and sexual practice.

Question With which of the three views do you feel most comfortable?

What role does the church play in our country's dominant culture? Is this role the right one, or should it play another?

What do you think of the statement: "Recognizing how cultural influences work in our lives is a key to making informed decisions?" How has this worked in your life?

With regard to widespread contemporary sexual practices, what is the meaning of Paul's statement: "for freedom Christ has set us free?"

What more might the church do to help people recognize wedding practices of popular culture that may actually cause harm?

Closing

Prayer and dismissal on Page 34 of the Study Book

Sexuality and Social Institutions Session 4

Gathering

As people gather, ask: Were you around during the “sexual revolution” ? What were your thoughts then and are they different now?

Hymn and Prayer on page 35 of the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 3:15-29

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Considering the Word

Vignettes on pages 35-36

Doug

Question: In your opinion, how is the issue of singleness and sexuality addressed? What ought the church to say to and about people whose experience is like that of Doug’s?

Fran and Chris

Question: How does this vignette match with your perceptions or experiences? Which pastor, in your opinion, acted more appropriately to the couple’s request to get married? What should the church be saying to Chris and Fran?

Contemporary Context

1. Marriage is a civil institution and is subject to regulation by the state. In the USA, marriage is a legal contract.
2. As a social institution, marriage
 - A. Creates a context for protecting, supporting, nurturing dependent children
 - B. Ensures that family members are cared for and determines who has the right to make decisions
 - C. Clarifies legal rights and responsibilities
 - D. Controls inheritance and other financial matters
3. A religious understanding of marriage
 - A. Embraces the social, moral and personal meaning of marriage
 - B. The purpose of the married relationship is to share together God’s work and support each other in the life of faith
4. Changes in the past years in marriage in the USA
 - A. Average size of a family has diminished.
 - B. People marry later in life or not at all.
 - C. Divorce is more common, and divorced persons remarry more often.
 - D. Dating begins earlier in life.
 - E. Older couples live together to retain financial benefits.
 - F. Virginity has come to be regarded almost with embarrassment.
 - G. Large numbers of young couples live together.

Questions: What do you see as being the strength in the institution of marriage? Why should people get married?

Do you see the changes in recent years as harmful or as an opportunity to use imaginative and creative discernment to provide new responses?

Reflections

1. Ethics can be described as managing change in a godly, wise and life enhancing way.
2. As Christians, freed in the gospel, we have been given the confidence and courage to deal creatively with cultural realities we confront.
3. With the Spirit present, we need not fear social change.
4. Faith changes both who we are and how we see.

Common Ground

1. Thinking about the institution of marriage, we need to recognize the importance of relationships that are based on mutual respect and responsibility.
2. A prior statement on Human Sexuality from the ALC calls upon members to build a Christian witness that takes account of God's activity in an "ever-changing world" and that accordingly undertakes constant review and interpretation.
3. We remember that the church's first concern is for people and that the body of Christ is a caring community that reaches out to those most in need.

Question: What teachings of our church do you consider most relevant to deliberation about courtship, marriage and family arrangements in the USA in the 21st Century? How do Lutherans define the meaning and benefits of marriage?

Possible Differing Interpretations and Views

1. More relaxed attitudes toward sexual expression are preferable to the guilt, shame, denial and anxiety of earlier eras that were "repressed." I welcome the change in thinking about the institution of marriage. I'm not sure it's wise to keep dysfunctional families together, or why people need to stay in a loveless marriage. Because people are marrying later, I think that cohabitation will be inevitable.
2. I am more ambivalent about these changes. Some are good, but others cause me concern. I am concerned about the growing tendency toward self-indulgence that makes people leery of bonds and promises. I worry that important virtues and values are being lost because so few seem willing to argue for them publicly.
3. I am very distressed by all of these changes. Important behavioral boundaries are being violated to the detriment of individuals and the common good. Sex has been trivialized. I think ministers ought to simply refuse to marry couples that have been living together outside of marriage and the church should remove divorced and remarried pastors from its roster. Churches and Christians need to take a stand.

Question: Which is closest to your personal view? Which view do you think is the majority view in your congregation? Why is this so?

Questions:

What do you want the church to help you learn or understand about this particular topic? What resources could and should the church provide for pastors and lay people. In Galatians 3:28-29, Paul states "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. What might these verses have to say to the Lutheran discussion of a variety of issues related to sexuality including marriage, singleness and same-sex relationships?

Closing

Prayer and Dismissal on page 42 of the Study Book

Gathering

As people gather, ask, “As you think back over what you’ve seen on TV or in magazines in the last few days? What advertisements, news, or programs stick out in your mind?”
Hymn and Prayer on page 43 of the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 4:1-20

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to the Word and World

Vignettes on Page 43 of the Study Book

Questions: Where do you see the potential abuse of power? Do you think these scenarios represent common attitudes about sexuality today? What issues of sexuality and power do you see in the third vignette? What rings true for you?

How common do you imagine is the conversation in the bishop’s office? Why are those who experience such abuse afraid to come forward? Why is it important that they do so? What stand does the church take in such instances?

Contemporary Context

1. Sexual power can be used to oppress, coerce, abuse and cause violence.
2. The intimacy of sexual relationships makes us vulnerable and so justice becomes imperative.
3. As Christians we will reflect on **correcting** imbalances of power, **protecting** the vulnerable, and **preventing** destructive behavior.
4. Certain abuses of power are clear and they are always recognized as deeply immoral.
5. And yet, we see examples in society where women are made sexual objects and targets of violence—music and videos.
6. There is a sense of denial—“boys will be boys”-- “she asked for it”—“prostitutes can’t be raped” --even our young people appear to think that some level of physical abuse is normal and ordinary and attribute the abuse to love.
7. Society has developed codes of conduct that define and prohibit sexual harassment by setting limits on the behavior of those who would exploit their power.
8. Of particular concern is the misuse of the pastoral office. In the ELCA constitution, the church recognizes that there is behavior that is deemed incompatible with ordained ministry and calls for disciplinary action.
9. Sexual attractiveness is its own form of power.

Questions: Do you think the laws in our society regarding sexual offenses and domestic violence are too harsh, too lenient or just about right? What role, if any, might the church play in addressing this? What should be done if a member of your congregation notices signs of possible abuse?

Do you agree or disagree that “it is not possible to discuss human sexuality without discussing justice?”

Reflections

1. Sex and sexuality are good gifts of God. But we know that even such good things can be used to hurt and abuse.
2. Timothy Wengert, in commenting on Luther’s “The Freedom of a Christian” describes how

the Christian believer, free in Christ and willing to discipline one’s self and to serve the neighbor, encounters a contrary will in the flesh. –The old creature may drown in baptism, but it is a good underwater swimmer. This leads to the double life of the

Christian as “saint and sinner” described by Paul in Romans 7. The point of limiting and disciplining ourselves are done simply out of spontaneous love and obedience to God, not to win God’s favor.

3. The challenge that confronts Lutheran Christians is not one of giving up desire and denying sexual needs, but of living boldly in ways that are not “of the flesh”—not abusive, unjust, careless, selfish, envious, vicious.
4. Sexual ethics is about deploying social and individual power to create and sustain healthy networks of relationships.

Common Ground

1. The right of free speech allows some forms of explicitly sexual language and depictions in music and media.
2. The ELCA constitution concerning justice says that the church shall care for the sick and aged, advocating dignity and justice of all people, working for peace and reconciliation, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
3. The ELCA message, “Sexuality: Some Common Convictions” condemns sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is the sinful use of power to dominate or control another person sexually. All forms of abuse are sinful.
4. The issue of consent is hard to gauge. Mature consent is certainly one necessary condition of morally acceptable sexual interaction, but it is by no means clear that it is a sufficient condition.

Question: Which of the issues introduced in this session are most disturbing to you? Why? What issues require greater attention by your own congregation? By the ELCA?

Possible Differing Views

1. To me, power is not intrinsically bad. Power can be exercised to change environments in a positive way. Powerful people can enhance the good. What we should ask is whether or not power is being exercised but is it being used the right way. We are hardwired by nature to look for attractive mates. Some men and women who complain about being harassed are over-sensitive.
2. The least we should do in the church is to educate people, especially young people to the way powerful commercial interests use sexuality to market their wares and influence patterns of behavior.
3. I would like to see our church publicly and vocally commit itself to the advancement of sexual health in our own country and around the world. Christian churches haven’t exercised enough leadership in this critical area of human health, social justice, and protection of the vulnerable and the scorned. I hope the churches will begin to speak out more forcefully and constructively on these issues, and will shoulder more responsibility in seeing that the sexual rights of all persons are recognized, protected, and preserved.

Questions: Which view or views make the most sense to you? What other views might be added? Should the church be more actively involved in issues of sexual justice? What other topics and moral perplexities seem to fit under this heading that were not mentioned?

Closing

Prayer and dismissal on page 50 of the Study Book

Session 6

Gathering

As people gather, ask, "When you go shopping for clothes, what do you look for?"
Hymn and Prayer found on Page 51 of the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 4:21-5:1

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to Word and World

Vignettes pages 51-52 of the Study Book

Sex at the Olympics

Debbie

Chad

Marcus

Question: In each of these cases, who is selling sex and who is buying?

What if anything should the church say to Debbie about her reading habits or Chad his chosen vocation? If your vocation involves selling sex on some level, what questions have you had to face.

What might the church want to say to a person like Marcus whose vocation involves selling sexually explicit materials? How likely do you think, is it that the explicit lyrics may have caused the boys to molest the 14-year-old girl. What other factors might be at work?

Contemporary Context

1. Sex sells! Why does it work and who is the target?
2. Internet provides a venue for sexually explicit material and playground for sexual predators.
3. Sex trade in prostitution: Their market of buyers and users is enormous

Reflections

1. Most of us support the sale of sex, whether we know it or not
2. Pornography revenues are \$10-20 billion, prostitution and exotic dancing are high-profile and overt forms
3. Clothing with sex-appeal
4. Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:27 that we are freed in order to ask legitimate questions about what are responsible choices as dutiful servants of all.
5. How do we respond in love to all who are actively involved in the selling or buying of sex?
6. The sixth commandment reminds us that we can't live chaste lives on our own.
7. How do we enjoy God-given sexuality without leading our neighbor astray?

Question What did you find helpful in this section? How might this affect your attitudes and responses to the issues raised in the session?

Common Ground

1. In 1970, the Lutheran Church in America denounced sexual exploitation in any situation, either personally or commercially, inside or outside legally contracted marriage, as sinful because it is destructive of God's good gift and human integrity.

Question: What has been your experience with the church offering sex education and lifting up issues related to sexuality? In addition to what is listed, what do you think our church teaches that is relevant to this session?

Possible Differing Views

1. I'm glad we are growing out of old cultural values into more positive and natural attitudes toward our sexual bodies and our natural desires. This less inhibited attitude allows us to discuss sexual matters more openly. I think most harmful sexual behaviors tend to arise out of the condition of denial and repression.
2. What we need is common sense and maturity. No one is forced to watch porn, buy sex toys or play graphically sexual or violent video games. We do need more education and awareness and we must work especially hard to be sure that our children see what is going on and learn to evaluate whether or not something is sexually exploitive.
3. I am deeply troubled but uncertain about what should be done. We seem to be caught in a conflict of values. I feel uneasy about speaking up for censorship. I don't want the government policing the bedroom or deciding what adults may or may not watch on TV or obtain from the Internet. I do think something needs to be done to slow down the sexualization of children and to control what is available on the Internet. Our culture needs to reestablish some behavioral limits and boundaries with regard to sex.
4. I feel contemporary attitudes toward the body, taken together with the use of sex to generate and increase profits is openly evil. We emphasize sexual performance at the expense of loving care. Our culture's preoccupation with sex verges on the demonic. Christians should refuse to support the sex industry in any way and boycott companies that use sexually charge advertising to sell their products.

Question: Which of the 4 views best fits your own view? Why? If you were to guess which view is most prominent in your congregation, which would it be?

Question: What particular issue raised in this session needs your most immediate attention?

What needs the immediate attention of the church?

To what degree do you think the sex trade targets people who are in difficult economic or environmental situations? Why? How can we as a church better respond to such needs?

Closing

Prayer and Dismissal on page 58 of the Study Book

Sexuality and Economic Justice

Session 7

Gathering

As people gather, ask, "When you were growing up, or in your family now, how was money viewed?"

Hymn and Prayer found on page 59 of the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 5:1-26

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to Word and World

Vignettes on pages 59-60 of the Study Book

Kristi

Question: Do you agree or disagree that economic circumstances affected her situation? What role might the church play in slowing or shutting down the pipeline of young girls entering prostitution from the Midwest to Las Vegas?

Brooke

Question: How common do you think Brook's story is? Some believe that some young adults are limited in their power to earn money when they leave poor schools and have few options in terms of career choices. Do you agree? How can the church address the problem?

Clark and Miriam

Question: If you were Miriam's pastor, how might you respond to Miriam's request to bless her relationship with Clark? What might you offer as a solution?

Bobbi and Tim

Question: What economic factors seem to have had an effect on Tim and Bobbi's relationship? What may be said to Bobbie and/or Tim? How common do you think this sort of scenario is?

Contemporary Context

1. When economic and cultural realities intersect with sex, they throw issues of justice into stark relief.
2. When a community-defined by its culture-also has a minority status, its members are potential objects of economic or social bias which can have a negative impact on sexual health.
3. Sometimes the effect of economic situation on sexual behavior is indirect.
 - Men and women with social status and good job prospects might delay marriage or parenthood, while taking precautions to avoid pregnancy.
 - Those who lack economic resources take a different view. The ability to father children may be one of the few forms of power they can claim. Those who have grown up under generational poverty may feel as if opportunities to change their circumstances are limited.
4. What do we in the church have to say in these situations, especially since most of our membership is from the middle strata of society whose lives rarely intersect with those who are poor?

Reflections

1. Like a tangled web, economic situation and sexuality clearly intersect at many points
2. In Galatians, Paul writes that freedom in the gospel is certainly not a license to indulge sexual power or privilege. It does not release us from responsible behavior, rather it is God's

radical call to serve one another regardless of economic situation or status.

3. In Galatians 6, Paul summarizes the ethical task saying that we are to take every opportunity to “work for the good of all”.

4. These passages in Galatians highlight two important features of Christian moral deliberation and judgment:

1. Our ethical deliberation includes attention to the concrete realities of persons’ situations rather than being rigid and abstract.

2. We are committed to seeking the good of all, with special commitment to remember the distinctive needs and challenges of the poor and disadvantaged.

Question: Did you discover a new insight in this section?

What factors figure most in your view of the connection between sexuality and economic situation?

How have economic forces and/or economic changes influenced your own sexual conduct or of those you know?

What sexual behaviors would you say are inappropriate no matter what the economic situation? What criteria help you to make this decision?

What economic forces in your community have an impact on matters related to sexuality? Does your congregation need to respond to what is happening? If so, what response is needed?

Common Ground

1. The 1980 social statement of the ALC suggests that a Lutheran understanding of Law and Gospel commits Lutherans to the goals of justice and equity without confusing these goals of justice for all, with the good news of salvation by grace.

2. The ELCA social statement “The Church in Society” refers to the work of the church both as a reconciling and healing presence and as a prophetic presence. The church is called to minister to human needs, while it has an obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow.

Question: To what degree is the church responsible for evaluating social policies, social arrangements, and economic inequities that may have an impact on sexual behavior?

Possible Differing Views

1. I think a person’s economic situation is irrelevant to the moral dimensions of his or her sexual conduct. I am worried that an emphasis on “race, class and gender” obscures what we all have in common and encourages us to think that we are victims of social systems, rather than creators of our own circumstances and futures.

2. I don’t think it is wise to say that the same moral ideals are desirable for all persons no matter what their circumstances. I really don’t think you can legislate morality much beyond basic laws to protect the innocent. We should identify the constraints on real people in real situations, because identifying the constraints increases the options that are available for choosing.

3. I think it is most important to address structures and systems rather than focusing on personal responses. When ethical teachings concerning sexual practices conflict with the values and requirements driven by peoples’ economic arrangements, we should not be surprised if they fail to conduct their sexual lives in accordance with those teachings.

Question: Which seems to most closely represent your opinion? Which do you think may best represent the majority opinion in your congregation?

Closing

Prayer and Dismissal on page 66 of the Study Book

Facing our Responsibility in the Freedom of the Gospel Session 8

Gathering

As People gather, ask, "What one thing do you most appreciate about having gone through this study?"

Hymn and Prayer page 67 of the Study Book

Hearing the Word

Galatians 6:1-18

Considering the Word

Silence

Discernment: What did you hear? What do you hear God saying to us?

Responding to the Word and World

Your Task

1. Now it is your turn to prepare and submit your comments to the task force. Have the goals of the ELCA task force been apparent to you in your experience of the study?

The goals are:

- We have been faithful to the church's call and produced an honest and faithful outcome
 - We have been able to discuss tough issues without undue division.
 - We have grown in our understanding of the Bible and its interpretation
 - We have engaged all generations
 - We have grown in a more comprehensive understanding of sexuality in all its dimensions
 - We have been able to chart and celebrate common ground wherever possible
2. What difference has the experience of Galatians and Luther's teaching on Christian freedom made in your deliberations?
3. What do we need to say to one another about the reality of moral dilemmas and Christian freedom? What dangers might we face in such a discussion? What might we do in our congregations to equip one another to face tough choices?
4. If we agree that we do indeed see things through a variety of lenses, is the "gospel lens" sufficient to make discerning judgments in a "spirit of gentleness?" How might such a gospel lens find expression in a social statement?
5. Looking through the gospel lens at the issues of cultural challenges, is it possible that Christian sexual ethics may need to undergo some new interpretations in order to be faithful to the true spirit of Christian love in today's world?
6. Does society have an obligation to promote the sort of economic conditions conducive to Christian ideals of sexual morality? Should the ELCA connect its social statement on economic life to this social statement on human sexuality?

More Common Ground

1. From the ELCA *Church in Society*: the church must unite realism and vision, wisdom

and courage, in its social responsibility. It needs constantly to discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values and powers.

2. Differing views need not divide us, as they are not matters of salvation.

3. Social Statements of the ELCA help shape the conscience of Christians by appealing to their faith, moral convictions, and reason. In their use as teaching documents, their authority is persuasive, not coercive. Church members are called upon to give social statements serious consideration as they form their own judgments.

Question Are you comfortable with the conviction that we can disagree on matters of sexuality and sexual ethics without being divided over it?

Reflect on your experience in your discussion group.

Invited to Respond

What topics not covered in the study might be important to address before the implementing of resolutions?

1. If you were a member of the ELCA Task Force, what one or two things might you want to be sure were communicated to the church through a social statement on sexuality?

2. Turn to the Response Form on page 73 and provide as many answers as you wish.

Closing

Prayer and Dismissal on page 71 of the Study Book