

## Talking Points Regarding the Revision of “Vision & Expectations”

1. Point #5 in the motion passed at the October 2018 Conference of Bishops states “that special attention be given to inclusive language and descriptions of life situations and relationships by inviting voices from diverse perspectives.” Bishops should hold themselves and their colleagues accountable to the commitments they make in resolutions.

2. It’s about trust - Trust in our church and in its policies is only garnered by courage and openness to change, and inclusion and diversity - two of the church’s stated values that are seemingly being ignored in this process. An inclusive process has more integrity than a document that says nice things but was written in seclusion.

3. Prescribing behaviors and norms = colonization and oppression. Documents that promote and call for “holy living and faithful witness” cannot be created only by those who hold power within our institution. This document’s purpose is gatekeeping - who are the gatekeepers who get to decide the rules?

4. The focus on the human sexuality portions of this revision - and conversations about “Vision and Expectations” in general - is due to our concern over the history of the document’s creation (see below) and the way the document has been used with candidates and rostered ministers. If more candidates were interrogated for when, with whom (if anyone), and how they prayed daily this conversation might be different.

5. Recognize the oppressive history of the document

- 1989 “Expectations Concerning Sexual Conduct of Candidates,” developed by the Division for Ministry, served as interim guidelines (and foundation for V&E)
  - “A pattern of behavior that includes homosexual erotic activity is conduct that is inappropriate and is reason for a person to be removed from candidacy in the ELCA.”
- 1990 “Vision and Expectations,” uses questions from rite of ordination
  - *Sexual conduct*: The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its ordained ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift of God and that ordained ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift . . . . Single ordained ministers are expected to live a chaste life. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their

self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.”

- Though hurtful in content, developed in community, in 1991 report to Churchwide, the Division for Ministry reported that they had “developed a draft document describing the gifts and abilities needed by this church in those who serve as ordained ministers. A broad consultation process that extended for one year—involving the division board, the Conference of Bishops, synods, seminaries, and synodical candidacy committees—led to the development of the final document entitled, *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*” (ELCA 1992:130).
- 2010 Revision of “Vision and Expectations” following the 2009 Churchwide Assembly which passed “Human Sexuality: Gift & Trust”
  - “This church is committed to the sanctity of marriage.<sup>2</sup>”
    - Footnote 2: “This “Vision and Expectations” document uses the terms “marriage,” “marry,” and “married” to refer to marriage between a man and a woman.”
  - “This church acknowledges that its members hold various convictions about lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. Nonetheless, this church has committed itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize and support lifelong, monogamous, same gender relationships and to hold the partners publicly accountable for the relationship. It has committed itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church. It also has committed itself to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in such relationships.<sup>4</sup> The ordained minister is expected to respect the people who hold these various convictions.
    - Footnote 4: “Action of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly – CA09.05.23, CA09.05.24, CA09.05.26, and CA09.05.27. “Because of these actions, this document includes this church’s vision and expectations for single people, married people, and people in “publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” The terms in the latter descriptive phrase are intended to have their common meanings. “Lifelong” means that the two parties intend the relationship to last as long as they both shall live. “Monogamous” means that the relationship is between two people only and excludes the possibility of other partners. “Same-gender” means that the relationship is between two men or two women of legal age. “Public accountability” means that the two parties to the relationship openly acknowledge the relationship, have a demonstrable commitment to the relationship as monogamous and lifelong and have a willingness to seek and accept the aid of individuals and community in sustaining the relationship and the well-being of both parties and any dependents. For an ordained minister, both church and

community are part of the public within which he or she is accountable. Public accountability for a married ordained minister includes recognition and support of the marriage in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law marriage requirements. Public accountability for an ordained minister in a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship includes recognition and support of the relationship in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law recognizing such relationships if available in the state where he or she resides or, if unavailable, other means of documenting the status of the relationship and protecting the well-being of the partner and any dependents.

6. What's the rush? If the Division for Ministry in 1991 conducted "a broad consultation process that extended for one year—involving the division board, the Conference of Bishops, synods, seminaries, and synodical candidacy committees," why not take the time to have an inclusive process that creates something that is communally crafted and supported? What is our fear?

7. We offer partnership and participation, not destruction. We desire a sexual ethic for the ELCA that is both life-giving and also protective of the most vulnerable. We believe the experiences of the marginalized - in body, identity, skin color, ability - offer perspectives on healthy human relationships that have been ignored by our church. We seek a process that centers and celebrates these identities as holy rather than simply being given the opportunity to comment on what is already created.

Note: These talking points were created by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries in consultation and conversation with colleagues representing LGBTQIA+ rostered ministers, seminary staff, and seminary faculty.