



## OSLC Council's Further Review Regarding the ELCA's

17 September 2023

# Welcome and Thanks for Coming

- Welcome to our In-Person Congregation Information Meeting
- This meeting follows up eMails sent out on 23 April & 15 June regarding Congregation questions about the direction the ELCA is leading its member congregations
- Any questions before we start?

Before we go further, lets Pray



Prayer



# Agenda

1. History of Lutheranism
2. History of Our Savior's Lutheran Church
3. History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)
4. Some Concerns about the ELCA
5. Next Steps

Minutes will be sent out to all Church members after the meeting  
Feel free to ask a question any time during this presentation

At any time afterwards, please send your questions/comments to any Council Member or eMail to  
**[office@oslclarimore.org](mailto:office@oslclarimore.org)**

# History of Lutheranism <sup>1</sup>

- Lutheranism, a branch of Christianity that traces its interpretation of the Christian religion to the teachings of Martin Luther and the 16th-century movements that issued from his reforms
  - In the nights before All Saints Day (Oct 31, 1517) Luther, a Priest, tacked to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany his 95 academic thesis "On the Power of Indulgences" hoping that some scholar would debate him about the relation of indulgence to penance
  - The thesis received unexpected response and Luther became the center of a public controversy
  - He was denounced in 1521 by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet (Assembly) of Worms, Germany, declaring Luther a heretic and his cause and Reformation was outlawed
  - In 1529 Charles V revoked a provision that allowed the ruler of each German state to choose whether they would enforce the Edict of Worms
  - Several princes and other supporters of Luther issued a protest, declaring that their allegiance to God trumped their allegiance to the Roman Emperor - they became known to their opponents as Protestants
  - By the time Luther died in 1546, his revolutionary beliefs had formed the basis for the Protestant Reformation, which would over the next three centuries revolutionize Western civilization



Reference 1 - This Day in History, Martin Luther posts 95 theses—*The History Channel*:  
<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/martin-luther-posts-95-theses>

## History of Lutheranism<sup>2</sup>

- The first large wave of Lutheran immigrants arrived in North America in the 1740s, with settlements in New York, the Carolinas, and Pennsylvania
- Globally, there are 150 Lutheran church organizations; 148 are loosely joined in the Lutheran World Federation, which was established in 1947
- Today there were more than 75 million Lutherans worldwide in 99 countries<sup>3</sup>, making Lutheranism the second largest Protestant denomination, after the Baptist churches



Reference 2 - **Encyclopedia Britannica, Lutheranism:**

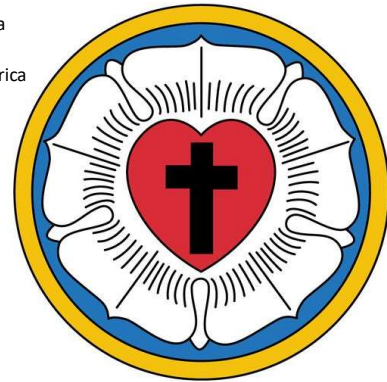
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lutheranism>

Reference 3 - **The Lutheran World Federation, Strategy plan 2019-2024:**

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/LWF-Strategy-2019-2024-abridged-EN-low.pdf>

# History of Lutheranism<sup>2</sup>

- Important mergers of various American Lutheran churches in the 20th century
  - 1917 - three Norwegian synods formed the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (**NLCA**)
  - 1918 - three German-language synods formed the United Lutheran Church in America (**ULCA**)
  - 1930 - the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa, and the Buffalo Synod formed the American Lutheran Church (German)
  - 1960 - the American Lutheran Church (German) merged with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Norwegian) to form the American Lutheran Church (**ALC**)
    - Lutheran Free Church (Norwegian) joined the ALC in 1963
  - 1962 - the ULCA joined with the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church (Swedish), the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) to establish the Lutheran Church in America (**LCA**)
  - 1988 - the ALC, LCA and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (**ELCA**)
- The Missouri and Wisconsin synods chose not to engage in any merger negotiations because of the more liberal stance of the other Lutheran bodies



Reference 2 - *Encyclopedia Britannica, Lutheranism:*  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lutheranism>





## Our Church History <sup>4</sup>

### Oct 1896 to Today - 126 years strong

- Oct 13, 1896, the Church was organized with approximately 14 families under the name Vor Frelzers Skandinaviske Lutherske Menighed (*Our Free Scandinavian Lutheran Parish*)
- Oct 19, 1896, the Church's name changed to Vor Frelzers Norsk Svensk Lutherske Kirke (*Our Free Norwegian Swedish Lutheran Church*)
- 1896 – First Church built by Volunteer Laborers
- 1901 – Congregation incorporated under the laws of the State of ND
- 1902 – Church became affiliated with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church
- 1914 – Basement and front steps added
- 1944 – Congregation voted unanimously that a new, larger Church was needed
- 1949 – Corporate name on file with the State of ND changed from *Our Savior's Scandinavian Lutheran Church* to *Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church*

Reference 4 – ***1996 Our Savior's Lutheran Centennial Book***





## Our Church History <sup>4</sup>

### Oct 1896 to Today - 126 years strong

- 1950 – Original Church sold to the Hutterite Community, Inkster ND for \$1,000 - moved, remodeled for use as their church and school
- 1951 – Dedication held for the current Church building (Membership was 241 families)
- 1954 – Church became affiliated with the assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- 1960 – Parsonage built
- 1960 – The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, The American Lutheran Church and The United Evangelical Church merged to become the American Lutheran Church (ALC)
- 1972 – Narthex enlarged, and four classrooms added
- 1985 – Some members of the Church chose to start a new Lutheran Church in Larimore due to the growing liberalism in the ALC
- 1987 – Congregation voted to agree with the merger that created the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), which became effective Jan 1988

Reference 4 – ***1996 Our Savior's Lutheran Centennial Book***

## History of the ELCA

- The ELCA is the largest Lutheran denomination in the U.S. with more than 8,900 congregations, nearly 3.3 million members, and 65 synods in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S., Virgin Islands <sup>5 and 8</sup>
- The ELCA has 240 missionaries around the world, in over 40 countries <sup>6</sup>
- The ELCA has a large social service organization, working with 300 health and human service organizations in an alliance known as Lutheran Services in America, serving more than 6 million people each year - as part of this alliance and mission, the ELCA supports more than 285 social ministry organizations <sup>7</sup>
- The ELCA has 7 accredited seminaries with 27 colleges and universities - a student does not have to be a member of the ELCA to attend these colleges or universities <sup>5 and 8</sup>
- Lutheran Disaster Services and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services provide help to many people each year <sup>9</sup>

Reference 5 - ELCA Website/Home/About the ELCA/Churchwide Organization:

[https://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide?\\_ga=2.242416772.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide?_ga=2.242416772.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338) and ELCA Website/Home/About the ELCA/Congregations:  
[https://www.elca.org/About/Congregations?\\_ga=2.43695523.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://www.elca.org/About/Congregations?_ga=2.43695523.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338)

Reference 6 - ELCA Website/Home/Our Work/Global Mission/Where we Work:

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Global-Mission/Where-We-Work>

Reference 7 - ELCA Website/Home/Our Work/Relief and Development/Social Ministry Organizations:

[https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/Social-Ministry-Organizations?\\_ga=2.249256705.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/Social-Ministry-Organizations?_ga=2.249256705.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338)

Reference 8 - ELCA Website/Home/Our Work/Become a Leader/Colleges and Universities/About

Colleges and Universities: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Colleges-and-Universities/About-Colleges-and-Universities>

Reference 9 - ELCA Website/Home/Our Work/Relief and Development: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development>

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development>

**NOTE:** For References 5 and 8, the information provided from the ELCA is inconsistent (not the same), so this is why these References are listed together on the slide

## History of the ELCA

- The ELCA's official Confession of Faith identifies the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (commonly called the Bible); the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds; and the Lutheran confessional writings in the Book of Concord as the basis for their teachings <sup>10</sup>
- ELCA congregations make the same affirmation in their governing documents, and ELCA pastors and deacons promise to carry out their ministry in accordance with these teaching sources <sup>10</sup>
- Despite the diversity of viewpoints and the complexity of the many narratives contained in the Scriptures, the ELCA believe that the story of God's steadfast love and mercy in Jesus is the heart and center of what the Scriptures have to say <sup>10</sup>

Reference 10 - ELCA Website/Home/Faith/ELCA Teaching:  
<https://www.elca.org/Faith/ELCA-Teaching>

**Book of Concord:** The Book of Concord contains documents which Christians from the 4th to the 16th century AD explained what they believed and taught on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. It includes, **first**, the three creeds which originated in the ancient church, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. It contains, **secondly**, the Reformation writings known as the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord. The Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles came from the pen of Martin Luther; the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and the Treatise were written by Luther's co-worker, the scholarly Phillip Melancthon; the Formula of Concord was given its final form chiefly by Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, and Nickolaus Selnecker.



## History of the ELCA

- The ELCA currently endorses the use of the National Council of Churches' New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue – 2021) translation <sup>11</sup>
- Lutheran women were first ordained as pastors in the United States in 1970, in churches that eventually formed the ELCA <sup>12 and 13</sup>
- The first woman of color was ordained in 1979 <sup>12 and 13</sup>
- In 2009, after a long period of studying the Scriptures and discerning our theological understanding of human sexuality, the barrier for ordination of LGBTQIA+ individuals was removed even as the church affirmed a variety of convictions <sup>13</sup>
  - Called the Four Bound Consciences <sup>14</sup>

Reference 11 - ELCA Website Presiding Bishop Eaton's Four Emphases Bible Study-Leaders Guide:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/PB\\_Eaton\\_4\\_Emphases\\_Bible\\_Study\\_Leaders\\_Guide.pdf?\\_ga=2.48405280.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/PB_Eaton_4_Emphases_Bible_Study_Leaders_Guide.pdf?_ga=2.48405280.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338)

Reference 12 - ELCA Website/Home/News Story: [ELCA celebrates 45 years of ordaining women - ELCA](#)

Reference 13 - ELCA Website/Home/About the ELCA/What We Believe/ELCA Faith Traditions/What's important to know about the history of the ELCA?: [ELCA Faith Tradition - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)

Reference 14 - Page 20, of the Social Statement "*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*": [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?\\_ga=2.44725282.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.44725282.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338) and Journal of Lutheran Ethics / Luther's Understanding of the Bound Conscience: [https://learn.elca.org/jle/luthers-understanding-of-the-bound-conscience/?\\_ga=2.44719266.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://learn.elca.org/jle/luthers-understanding-of-the-bound-conscience/?_ga=2.44719266.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338)

## Concerns about the ELCA

- Varying from the Inerrant Word of God – varying from the authority of God’s Word over all matters of faith and life, particularly the authority of Scripture
- Changing Masculine and Gender References
- Position on Human Sexuality
  - Bound Conscience
- Actions perceived as endorsing Universalism – general philosophical belief that everyone is saved without regard to God’s promise of mercy in Jesus Christ and confident trust or faith in that promise

2 Timothy 4:3-5 (NIV) – “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”



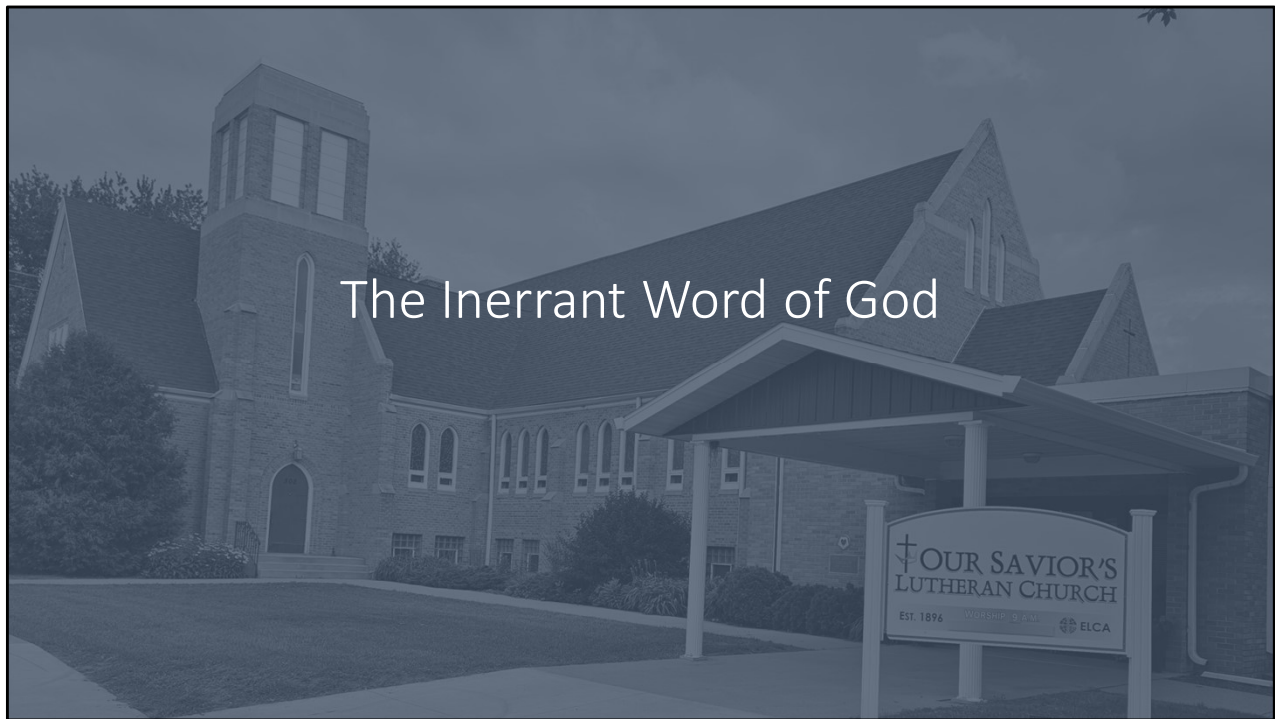
## Before we Start

# What are ELCA Social Statements [SS]?

<https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements> (*Link sent out 23 April 2023*)

- “This church shall develop **social statements ... that will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty.**” (ELCA social statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective”)
- “ELCA social statements are **teaching and policy documents** that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. **They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God’s work in the world. Social statements also set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church.** They result from an extensive process of participation and deliberation and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.”
- “There are ELCA resources for social teaching and policy. These documents include social statements [SS], social messages [SM] and social policy resolutions. **These documents arise from and reflect on the changing circumstances of the world in light of God’s presence and work. They are developed to assist members and congregations in thinking about social issues and to guide the church’s life in society and creation.**”

EXAMPLE **[ABC123]** – Any bracketed information that has been added to a referenced quote or text has been added for clarification by the authors of this presentation and are/were not part of the original quote.



# ELCA's Position on the Word of God

## What the ELCA says

- SS - "A Lutheran reading of the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally."<sup>15</sup>
- "There is nothing self-evident about divine revelation in its pages [Bible]. Understanding Scripture is always a struggle. There is a weakness and limitations to the text itself, since it is not all consistent, ethical, rational, nor does it always make sense. The interpretation of Scripture, for Luther, presupposes that we trust God, that we pray that the Spirit reveal its truth, and that in God's mercy we hear God's word addressing us."<sup>16</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- 2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV) - "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."
- "Martin Luther asserted that his conscience was captive to the Word of God and that he could not go against conscience. This was not, however, a modern plea for the supremacy of the individual conscience or for religious freedom. Though already excommunicated by Rome, Luther saw himself as a sworn teacher of Scripture who must advocate the right of all Christians to hear and live by the gospel."<sup>17</sup>

Reference 15 - Page 40, item 17 of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 16 – Nelson Rivera, author of the 01 Jan 2018 article entitled "*Freed in Reading the Scripture*" in the *ELCA Journal of Lutheran Ethics*:  
<https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1220> - see Item [29]

Reference 17 – Dr. Scott H. Hendrix, author of "*Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict*" (Fortress, 1981), whose work/quote was presented in the 08 Aug 2008 *Christianity Today (CT)* article by Elesha Coffman entitled "*What Luther Said*":  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-luther-said.html>

# ELCA's Position on the Word of God

## What the ELCA says

- [ELCA Bishop Elizabeth Eaton] "Eaton also outlined during the interview that while she believes that the Bible is inerrant, the ELCA does not view all Scripture as literal." and she said "Lutherans—at least our understanding—we're not biblical literalists, and I would say that no one is a biblical literalist."<sup>18</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- How do you respond to someone's claim that the Bible is not inspired in its literal presentation? Is there a way to prove inspiration, or intelligently present evidence for its inspiration? The answer is, "Yes!" One of the best ways to prove inspiration is by examining prophecy which details scripture from the old testament and Jesus' fulfillment of it:
  - The coming of Jesus was literal prophecy from the Bible

Reference 18 – Heather Clark, author of the 08 Sep 2017 article from *Christian News* summarizing an interview between Robert Herguth and ELCA Bishop Eaton entitled "ELCA Presiding 'Bishop' Claims: 'There May Be a Hell, But I Think It's Empty'":  
<https://christiannews.net/2017/09/08/elca-presiding-bishop-claims-there-may-be-a-hell-but-i-think-its-empty/>

# ELCA's Position on the Word of God

## What the ELCA says

- According to an article by the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA, Bishop Ann Svennungsen
  - "We Lutherans believe that the Bible truly matters. But, it doesn't matter as much as the Word made Flesh. It doesn't matter as much as Jesus. To quote Marcus Borg, "Jesus is the norm of the Bible. When the Bible and what we see in Jesus conflict, as they sometimes do, Jesus trumps the Bible. ... In Jesus, Christians see more clearly than anywhere else the character and passion of God.""
- All Scripture is based on the Gospel - Christians are supposed to **let the Gospel be the eyeglasses through which we read scripture**

## What the Bible has to say

- James 2:10 (NIV) - "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."
- Matthew 5:17 (NIV) - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill."
- Rather than being negative about Law, we are submissive and are inclined to do them because of the work of the Holy Spirit
- You cannot have the Gospel without the Law; or to put this another way, no one knows his or her need for the Savior without knowing his or her sinfulness

Reference 19 - ELCA Bishop Ann Svennungsen from the Minneapolis Area Synod, author of the 07 Mar 2023, article "Can circles once again not be square?" from the ELCA website: <https://mpls-synod.org/2023/03/can-circles-once-again-not-be-square/>



# ELCA's Position on the Word of God

## What the ELCA says

- In a well-documented audio and print interview with Robert Herguth of the *Chicago Sun Times* published in March of 2018, **Bishop Eaton was directly asked: "Is there a hell?"** To which our presiding Bishop responded:
  - **"There may be, but I think it is empty."** When asked a follow up question: "Why?" Bishop Eaton's response was "Jesus was clear" in the Bible that after he was "raised up he will draw all people to himself."<sup>20</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- We cannot find any scriptural basis for this as it is **inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture** that after death the soul goes directly either to heaven (in the case of a Christian) or hell (in the case of a non-Christian) as summarized by Lutheran theologian Edward Koehler in his book, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*:
  - **In the moment of death the souls of the believers enter the joy of heaven.** Jesus said to the malefactor <sup>21</sup>: **"Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise"** (Luke 23:43). Stephen said in the hour of death: **"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"** (Acts 7:59).
  - Revelation 22:18-19 - **"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."**

Reference 20 - Robert Herguth, author of the 07 May 2018 article from the *Chicago Sun Times* entitled *"Top Lutheran bishop: If hell exists, 'I think it's empty'"*:

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2018/3/7/18372814/top-lutheran-bishop-if-hell-exists-i-think-it-s-empty>

Reference 21 – **DEFINITION:** Malefactor is "One who has committed a crime; a criminal.", and in his referenced quote, Mr. Edward Koehler is referring to the criminal crucified with Jesus

# ELCA's Position on the Word of God

## What the ELCA says

- SS - The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures. We also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in the Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism.<sup>22</sup>
- SS - "Just as this church has identified racism as sin, this church identifies patriarchy and sexism as sin."<sup>23</sup>
  - **Patriarchy** - A social system that enables men to have more power than, and power over, women and people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles.<sup>24</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- Humanity should be careful using current culture awareness to define new sins
- Romans 14:10 (NIV) - "You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat."
- James 4:11-12 (NIV) - "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?"
- Sin, simply defined, is that which dishonors God

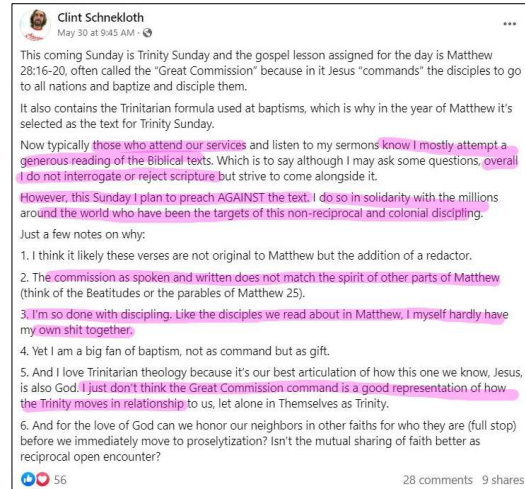
Reference 22 - Page 6, item 17 of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 23 - Page 5, item 15 of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 24 - Page 78, ELCA definition of the word Patriarchy, of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

## ELCA's Acceptance

- Clint Schnekloth, pastor of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lafayette AR <sup>25</sup>, (an ELCA church and a Reconciling in Christ [LGBTQIA+ inclusive] congregation) announced on Facebook that he was going to be preaching **"AGAINST"** the text that contains the Great Commission..."
- The next Sunday he gave his Sermon <sup>26</sup>, engaging in criticism of the scriptures, freely admitting that much of it is untrue and self-contradictory but that he's okay with it - specifically, he goes after the Great Commission as against the spirit and teaching of Jesus



<https://www.facebook.com/schnekloth/posts/pfbid029BZuidmycVCQByHf8N823ApArBkc4Kfn9fWtzKk8ocSTQgxryJDpgWB3YyowzH1T>

Reference 25 - Home page of the Good Shephard Lutheran Church: [Home - Good Shepherd Lutheran Church \(goodshepherdnwa.org\)](http://goodshepherdnwa.org)

Reference 26 - Video of Pastor Schnekloth's sermon: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1673989945768177665>

Pastor Clint Schnekloth is pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, Arkansas since Jan 2011; founder and chairman of the board of Canopy NWA, a refugee resettlement agency; and blogs at Patheos, Inc. He is the founder of Washington County Cares, a local government advocacy group, partners with Albious Latior in Marshallese community support, and is currently organizing Queer Camp for LGBTQIA+ youth. Previously, Clint has served as pastor of East Koshkonong Lutheran Church, Cambridge, WI, as a global missionary with the ELCA in Kosice, Slovakia, Program Director at the Global Mission Institute, Luther Seminary; Camp Director of Camp Shalom, Maquoketa, Iowa, and in a variety of camp and youth ministry positions. In 2014 when same-gender marriage became legal in Arkansas he officiated weddings of same-gender parishioners and remained committed to doing so after council opposition. The council initiated the denominational process for removal and the congregation voted against that.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/clint-schnekloth-06864bb/> and

<https://clintschnekloth.substack.com/p/everything-i-learned-as-a-pastor>

# Changing Masculine and Gender References



# ELCA's Position on Masculine References

## What the ELCA says

- SS - "Use inclusive language (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and expansive language (other than human) for God."<sup>27</sup>
- SS - "..., this church urges Christians to work together to confront the problem of exclusive language and imagery because these contribute significantly to patriarchal religious beliefs and practices. The formulation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the center of the conversation. Many Christians think this is the only correct way to speak of God, which reinforces exclusively masculine associations. Others think that the traditional Trinitarian formulation should be changed or discarded because it promotes a faulty understanding of God as essentially male."<sup>28</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- Jesus, who Christians believe to be fully human and fully God, came to Earth in bodily form as a man
- We cannot find any scriptural basis for this Bible re-interpretation change as it is inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture - Is ELCA Leadership taking their cues from culture rather than scripture?
- We call it the 'Lord's Prayer' because it is the prayer the Lord gave us - He taught us to pray it - We call God 'Our Father' because that is how he instructed us to address him - Is the ELCA saying Christ was wrong? That God made a mistake?

Reference 27 - Page 53, item 27 of the "Social Statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 28 - Page 54-55, item 27 of the "Social Statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>



# ELCA's Position on Masculine References

## What the ELCA says

- SS - "The ELCA affirms the creedal witness to the mystery, relations, and actions of the three persons of the Trinity. At the same time, **this church holds that exclusive use of a male-oriented formula to refer to God is problematic.** The use of expansive language for God reflects faithfulness to God's self-revelation in the Scriptures and in human experience."<sup>29</sup>
- Prayer posted in 2020 to the ELCA Twitter account <sup>30</sup>:
  - **"Mother God**, you have fed us with the nourishment of your spiritual food. Raise us up into salvation and rid us of our bitterness, so that we may share the sweetness of your holy word with all the world."

## What the Bible has to say

- The Bible refers to God using masculine pronouns throughout both the Old and New Testaments
- **So why does it matter if we refer to God as Father or Mother? -- Because we want to be biblical!** There is no "Mother God" ever mentioned in the Bible. There is only one true God, revealed to us in Scripture. **We cannot add to the Bible or add our own ideas about who God is to what he has revealed to us.**

Reference 29 - Page 54, item 27 of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 30 - Michael Gryboski, author of the 01 May 2020 article from *The Christian Post* entitled "*ELCA faces criticism for posting prayer to 'Mother God' on Facebook, Twitter*": <https://www.christianpost.com/news/elca-faces-criticism-for-posting-prayer-to-mother-god-on-denominations-facebook-twitter-accounts.html>

## ELCA's Acceptance

- Liturgy of the divine feminine
- The ELCA allows for the worship of "the goddess" and other pagan deities at an ELCA church in San Francisco called **herchurch sf** <sup>31</sup>
- This congregation practices witchcraft and worships the "feminine" aspects of God, referring to God as "the goddess." Their Mission is a Liturgy of the Divine Feminine; Our mission is to embody and voice the prophetic wisdom and word of the Divine Feminine, to uplift the values of compassion, creativity, and care for the earth and one another
- **herchurch** is another name used for the Ebenezer Lutheran Church in San Francisco, a congregation within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

### Divine Feminine <sup>31</sup>

**Feminism** is a movement and theory for economic, political, social, and religious equality, rights, and dignity of all wo/men. It is focused on the struggle of wo/men against domination, exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization.

we are She <sup>31</sup>



Reverend Stacy Boorn  
Pastor & Priestess of Ritual

Rev. Stacy Boorn, M. Div., ordained since 1987, claims her mainstream theological education opened the door for her to build a Goddess-inclusive congregation and ministry. Her tradition, which teaches good news grounded in liberating love and free grace from the Holy Other, provides a rich soil for growing new vision.



Priestess Katie Ketchum  
Sister of Song, Lead Musician

Singer/Songwriter/Pianist Katie Ketchum M.A. is the director of the herchurch choir and lead musician for herchurch services. She works alongside lyricist Jann Aldredge-Clanton to compose many of the songs herchurch choir sings from her published work "Hersay: Songs for Healing and Empowerment." Katie teaches painting with Jennifer Mantle in the Holy Women/Goddess Icon Making class at herchurch. Katie is known for her one woman musicals about historical women, such as Clara Schumann, Mary Cassatt, and Mary Magdalene, on the east and west coasts.

Reference 31 - <https://www.herchurch.org>

Nov 1988: Rev Boorn becomes full-time interim mission-assessor pastor at Ebenezer Lutheran Church. 1999: Pastor Boorn, with the parents' permission, baptized a child "in the name of God who is our Mother and our Father and in the name of Jesus, who is the child of God." 2002: The congregation began using the name herchurch after erecting the banner, "Everybody welcome at the table. Sunday morning worship at 10:30 a.m. God loves all Her children!", on the church exterior. 2003: herchurch began using female imagery in its liturgies.: <https://wrlldrels.org/2022/10/19/her-church/>

## ELCA's Acceptance – New Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4)

### **herchurch sf**

Our Mother who is within us,  
we celebrate your many names;  
your wisdom come,  
your will be done, unfolding in the depths within us.  
You give us everything we need.  
You remind us of our limits and we let go.  
You support us in our power,  
and we act with courage.  
For you are the dwelling place within us, the  
empowerment around us, the celebration among us,  
now and forever.  
Blessed be.

<https://www.lutherancore.website/2022/01/18/the-lords-prayer-at-herchurch/>

### **Luther's Small Catechism**

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name.  
thy kingdom come.  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory  
forever and ever.  
Amen

# ELCA's Position on Masculine References

## What the ELCA says

- The NRSVue's (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition-2021) <sup>32</sup> gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language are considered a pro by some and a con by others, depending on one's opinion on the matter. Many evangelical translations have adopted gender-neutral language and some also use gender-inclusive language. <sup>33 and 34</sup>

### Side-by Side Examples

- 1 John 5:1 (NRSVue) - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the **parent** loves the child."
- John 3:13 (NRSVue) - "No one has ascended into **heaven except the one** who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

## What the Bible has to say

- Gender-inclusive translators fail to understand this: to deviate, in any way, from the pattern, or likeness of how God brought his Word into existence, merely perverse the Bible to a book that reflects the cultural age and desire of the current times <sup>34</sup>

### Comparison to NIV (1978) - #1 most used Bible translation

<https://churchnews.com/blog/top-ten-best-selling-bible-translations-compared-to-ten-years-ago-2021-update/>

### Side-by Side Examples

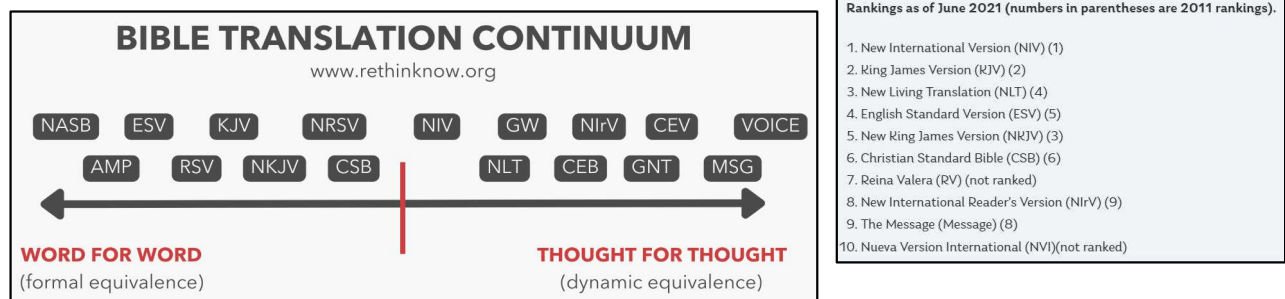
- 1 John 5:1 (NIV) - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and **everyone** who loves the **father** loves his child as well."
- John 3:13 (NIV) - "No one has ascended into **heaven except he** who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

Reference 32 - NSRV and NIV passages in this complete presentation were taken from Bible Study Tools at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/>

Reference 33 - NSRV Vs ESV Bible, by Fritz Chery on the Bible Reasons website: <https://biblereasons.com/nrsv-vs-esv-bible/>

Reference 34 - W. Grudem, author of the 1997 article entitled "What's Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?" found on the *Helpmewithbible study.org* website: [http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5Bible/TransWhatsWrongGenderNeutralBible\\_Grudem.aspx](http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5Bible/TransWhatsWrongGenderNeutralBible_Grudem.aspx)

Bible translations: <https://www.rethinknow.org/best-bible-translations/> and <https://faithfoundedonfact.com/the-5-most-accurate-bible-translations/>







# ELCA's Position on Human Sexuality

## What the ELCA says

### Side-by Side Examples

- 1 Timothy 1:10 (NRSVue) - “fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching”
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NRSVue) - “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God”
- Leviticus 18:22 (NRSVue) - “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”
- Genesis 9:5 (NRSVue) - “and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.’”

## What the Bible has to say

### Side-by Side Examples

- 1 Timothy 1:10 (NIV) - “for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine”
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV) - “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God”
- Leviticus 18:22 (NIV) - “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.”
- Genesis 9:5 (NIV) - “They called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’”

**DEFINITION:** Sodomites: The use of the word “Sodomite,” which links all same-sex relations to the story of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19. Some modern biblical scholars — especially those supported by the ELCA — believe the sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but abusive violation of ancient norms of hospitality.

# ELCA's Position on Human Sexuality

## What the ELCA says

- "ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton celebrates the ways this church and this country have been enriched by the gifts of LGBTQIA+ people."<sup>35</sup>
- **Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber**, installed as pastor of public witness on 20 Aug 2021, a new position in the ELCA, spoke at the 2018 ELCA National Convention and lead 31,000 youth to proclaim "I renounce the lie that queerness is anything other than beauty"<sup>36</sup>
- ELCA defends new interpretation in a 28 page essay<sup>38</sup>
  - "The laws [Bible] represent a "codification of [Israel's] disdain" for same-gender sexual relationships, but that "in no way, represents an unalterable law inherent in human nature." The condemnation expressed in these laws "derives from fears and taboos" that should not be perpetuated in the present."<sup>38-1</sup>
  - "As far as we can tell, the biblical writers knew nothing about "homosexuality" as a sexual orientation. The concepts of "homosexuality," "homosexual," "heterosexuality," and "heterosexual" are modern, first articulated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As strange as it may sound, it can be said that the Bible teaches nothing concerning homosexuality."<sup>38-2</sup>

## • What the Bible has to say

- Scripture clearly teaches (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10), the position on homosexual behavior is unequivocal and contrary to God's and Jesus' will
- The ELCA has declared that it lacks a consensus regarding what Scripture teaches about homosexual activity, consequently, those who disagree with one another in the ELCA have been called to respect the 'bound conscience' of others<sup>37</sup>

### Further Discussion of Bound Conscience to follow

- Dr. Jacqueline Bussie, Director of the Forum on Faith and Life and Associate Professor of Religion at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN states "It is my contention that a careful reading of Martin Luther's classical notion of a theologia crucis (theology of the cross) provides us with theological support, grounded firmly in tradition and the gospel, for a convicted rejection of the ban on gay marriage."<sup>39</sup>

Reference 35 - ELCA Resources for the LGBTQIA+ Community: <https://www.elca.org/lgbtq>

Reference 36 - 20 Aug 2021, Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber (ELCA Pastor of Public Witness), ELCA Youth Gathering speech, (see at minute 22:05) (Video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBtyZbauH0g>

Reference 37 - Page 19 and 20, of the Social Statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": [Human Sexuality - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca. https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexualityorg\)](https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexualityorg)

Reference 38 - 2003 ELCA BACKGROUND ESSAY on BIBLICAL TEXTS by Arland J. Hultgren and Walter F. Taylor Jr entitled "Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality": [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Journey\\_Together\\_Faithfully\\_Background\\_Essay.pdf?\\_ga=2.235657545.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Journey_Together_Faithfully_Background_Essay.pdf?_ga=2.235657545.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338)

- Reference 38-1, page 8, specifically references (Leviticus 18:22 NIV) "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." and (Leviticus 20:13 NIV) "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."
- Reference 38-2, FINAL OBSERVATIONS, page 17

Reference 39 - Dr. Jacqueline Bussie, author of the Oct 2005 article from the *ELCA Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, entitled "Scarred Epistemologies: What a Theology of the Cross Has to Say about the Gay Marriage Ban": [https://learn.elca.org/jle/scarred-epistemologies-what-a-theology-of-the-cross-has-to-say-about-the-gay-marriage-ban/?\\_ga=2.192207330.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338](https://learn.elca.org/jle/scarred-epistemologies-what-a-theology-of-the-cross-has-to-say-about-the-gay-marriage-ban/?_ga=2.192207330.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338)

# ELCA's Position on Human Sexuality

## What the ELCA says

- Homosexual persons have been an oppressed sexual minority and have suffered much at the hands of the Church, in the name of Christ
- The ELCA considers itself one of the most welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ members
- "The 2015 social message encourages the church to identify sources of gender-based violence and root out these sources by naming them in sermons and educational settings. This requires pastors to preach on gender-based violence; this requires congregations to offer educational series on gender-based violence; this requires us all to consider what work remains?"
- "...a person's genitalia are only one part of one's sexual make-up; therefore the "anatomical complementarity" that seems so obvious is not the primary clue to any one person's sexual orientation, even if it is for most persons."

## • What the Bible has to say

- Homosexual persons HAVE been an oppressed sexual minority and HAVE suffered much at the hands of the Church, in the name of Christ - This is tragic and wrong
- The issue is not over how homosexual persons should be treated (Scripture is clear that all people should be treated with love), the issue is over the authority of Scripture and holiness of the Name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- There's a difference between tolerating a behavior and endorsing it - We hate the sin and pray for the sinner - But, the ELCA is actively ENDORSING this behavior, taking every opportunity to say how wonderful homosexuality is and to celebrate homosexuals' "Pride"

Reference 40 - Nicole Garcia, author of the 2022 article *ELCA Journal of Lutheran Ethics* entitled "The Humanity of Transgender and Nonbinary People" item [13]:

<https://learn.elca.org/jle/the-humanity-of-transgender-and-nonbinary-people/>

Reference 41 - Page 8 of the 2003 ELCA BACKGROUND ESSAY on BIBLICAL TEXTS by Arland J. Hultgren and Walter F. Taylor Jr entitled "Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality":

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Journey\\_Together\\_Faithfully\\_Background\\_Essay.pdf?\\_ga=2.235657545.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Journey_Together_Faithfully_Background_Essay.pdf?_ga=2.235657545.935383688.1689273176-519798059.1688941338)

## ELCA's Acceptance



- In 2021, Dawn Bennett became an ELCA ordained pastor for the Table church in Nashville <sup>42</sup> under the leadership of Bishop Kevin Strickland in the Southeastern Synod
- Pastor Bennett, who is a self-described she/her bisexual, queer woman had at her ELCA ordination ten drag queens dressed as nuns, the Sisters of Perpetual sat and cheered (an LGBTQ+ protest group that uses "religious imagery to call attention to sexual intolerance and satirizes issues of gender and morality."), and doing the readings were a "pagan wiccan priest who loves Jesus," and an agnostic best friend <sup>43</sup>

Reference 42 - <https://www.thetablenashville.org/>

Reference 43 - 2020 article by **Protestia** Staff Writer entitled "Queer ELCA Pastrix Ordained With Drag Queen Nuns While Jennifer Knapp Serenades":

<https://protestia.com/2023/02/27/queer-elca-pastrix-ordained-with-drag-queen-nuns-while-jennifer-knapp-serenades/>



## *ELCA's Acceptance*

- Edina Community Lutheran Church: a member congregation of the ELCA and a Reconciling in Christ (LGBTQIA+ inclusive) congregation <sup>44</sup>
- A female Lutheran pastor in Minnesota has gone viral for leading her congregation in a “sparkle creed” <sup>45</sup> prayer in honor of LGBT pride month in which she described God as “nonbinary” and Christ Jesus as having “two dads.”



<sup>46</sup>

AS A RECONCILING IN CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH,  
WITH JUSTICE AND WORSHIP AT OUR CORE,  
WE HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF EMBRACING  
LGBTQIA+ INCLUSION, RACIAL JUSTICE, AND ECOFAITH



Reference 44 - Home page for Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina MN:  
<https://www.eclc.org/home>

Reference 45 - The “Sparkle Creed” was originally created in 2021 by Reverend Rachel Small-Stokes, a pastor at the Immanuel United Church of Christ in Louisville, Kentucky:  
<https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2023/06/29/sparkle-creed-reading-at-edina-lutheran-church-sparks-huge-online-debate/>

Reference 46 - Live Stream broadcast of Pastor Anna Helgen’s Sparkle Creed can be viewed at this location: [https://youtu.be/e14fel74\\_Uc](https://youtu.be/e14fel74_Uc)



# Words of the Sparkle Creed

## **Sparkle Creed**

- “I believe in the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural. I believe in Jesus Christ, their child, who wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads and saw everyone as a sibling-child of God. I believe in the rainbow Spirit, who shatters our image of one white light and refracts it into a rainbow of gorgeous diversity. I believe in the church of everyday saints as numerous, creative and resilient as patches on the AIDS quilt, whose feet are grounded in mud and whose eyes gaze at the stars in wonder. I believe in the call to each of us that love is love, so beloved, let us love. I believe, glorious God. Help my unbelief.”

[A New Interpretation of Faith: The Story Behind the LGBTQ+-Inclusive 'Sparkle Creed' \(religionunplugged.com\)](http://religionunplugged.com)

## **Apostle's Creed**

- “I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.”

# ELCA's Position on Human Sexuality

## What the ELCA says

- SS - "Therefore, references to **women and girls in this document mean all people who identify as women and girls**. A word such as women often fails to convey its full meaning because our minds tend to default either to our own experiences and identities or to what the culture validates as a normative, "desired," or dominant meaning."<sup>47</sup>
- SM - "The **U.S. social system also functions in ways that devalue people according to age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status and ethnicity**."<sup>48</sup>
- (Psalm 107:13-14) "They cried to the **Lord** in their trouble, and **Ze** delivered them from their distress; **Ze** brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart"<sup>49</sup>
  - Ze is a Gender-inclusive term for God

## • What the Bible has to say

- Genesis 5:1 (NIV) - "...When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. **He created them male and female** and blessed them..."
- Matthew 19:4-6 (NIV) - "Haven't you read," he replied, "**that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,** and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, **and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.**"
- Psalm 107:13-14 (NIV) - "Then they cried to the **Lord** in their trouble, and **he** delivered them from their distress. **He** brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart."

Reference 47 - Page 26, item 9 of the Social Statement "*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*": <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 48 - Page 9 of the Social Message called "*Gender-base Violence*":  
<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Sexism>

Reference 49 - Notes to help Sermon Development from ELCA Luther Seminary, St Paul MN, authored by Jennifer Chrien and Jessica Davis: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/sermon-development/preaching-trauma>

## What is Bound Conscience?

- To try and appease all opinions, the ELCA created in 2009 what is known as the “Four Bound Consciences” within the statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” that acknowledged that a “consensus does not exist concerning how to regard same-gender committed relationships” within the denomination <sup>50</sup>
- The statement recognizes four “conscience-bound” positions on homosexuality, including <sup>51</sup>
  1. One that believes “same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law”
  2. One that believes “homosexuality and even lifelong, monogamous, homosexual relationships reflect a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended”
  3. One that believes that “scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today”
  4. and, One that believes that “scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today”

Full Bound Conscience text follow and are reprinted on the next slide

Reference 50 - Page 19 of the Social Statement “*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*”:  
<https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexuality>

Reference 51 – Michael Gryboski , author of the 17 Aug 2022 Article from ***The Christian Post***, entitled, “*ELCA vote opens door to nixing conscience protections for same-sex marriage opponents*”: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/elca-opens-door-to-nixing-protections-for-gay-marriage-opponents.html>

## Bound Conscience – From ELCA Social Statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” 52

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.

On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that **homosexuality and even lifelong, monogamous, homosexual relationships reflect a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended**. While they acknowledge that such relationships may be lived out with mutuality and care, they do not believe that the neighbor or community are best served by publicly recognizing such relationships as traditional marriage.

On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the **scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today**. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are honored and held to high standards and public accountability, but they do not equate these relationships with marriage. They do, however, affirm the need for community support and the role of pastoral care and may wish to surround lifelong, monogamous relationships or covenant unions with prayer.

On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the **scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today**. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage. They surround such couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe same-gender couples should avail themselves of social and legal support for themselves, their children, and other dependents and seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.

Reference 52 - Page 20 of the Social Statement “*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*”:  
[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?\\_ga=2.44725282.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.44725282.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338) and *ELCA Journal of Lutheran Ethics*  
 / Luther’s “*Understanding of the Bound Conscience*”: [https://learn.elca.org/jle/luthers-understanding-of-the-bound-conscience/?\\_ga=2.44719266.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338](https://learn.elca.org/jle/luthers-understanding-of-the-bound-conscience/?_ga=2.44719266.743135216.1688941338-519798059.1688941338)

## Bound Conscience

- At the **2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly**, the Bishop authorized revisions to the current Social Statement on Human Sexuality; and **approved exploration positions of the four stated positions of "bound conscience"** <sup>53 and 54</sup> – The next Churchwide Assembly is in 2025
  - Memorial C3 – Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Revision: Authorizes (741-59) a reconsideration to revise the social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009)” **so its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples**. The action includes identifying the cost of revision and the revenue source for such work, which could be considered as early as the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
  - Depending on which position the ELCA lands, **congregations might no longer be allowed to state their objections** (or ignore new ELCA policies) based on their Congregations “Bound Conscience” to the Word of God
  - **Congregations could be open to disciplinary action and other negative consequences from the ELCA**

Reference 53 - 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly summary: <https://elca.org/News-and-Events/8172>

Reference 54 - Michael Gryboski , author of the 17 Aug 2022 Article from ***The Christian Post***, entitled, “*ELCA vote opens door to nixing conscience protections for same-sex marriage opponents*”: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/elca-opens-door-to-nixing-protections-for-gay-marriage-opponents.html>



## Your Conscience

- “...when you're talking about the understanding of God, the understanding of sin, the understanding of humanity, the understanding of Christ, the understanding of the atonement, the understanding of salvation justification, the understanding of the church, the understanding of Scripture, everything, well, **you're not looking at anything Martin Luther, the great reformer, would recognize because it was Luther who said that his conscience was bound not by a moral revolution which he could not even have imagined, rather his conscience is bound by scripture**”<sup>55</sup>
  - When Martin Luther was called before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 to recant his 95 Academic thesis he said **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason-for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves-I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.”**<sup>56</sup>
  - In Reformation terms, we say that **“God alone is Lord of the conscience”**<sup>57</sup>
  - The Lutheran Confessions (Augsburg Confession) also explain clearly and frequently that **humans or human traditions cannot bind the conscience – only God can by his Word**<sup>58</sup>

Reference 55 - Albert Mohler, author of the 10 May 2021 article from his website entitled, *“Martin Luther Wouldn't Recognize the Evangelical Lutheran Church Today: Lutherans Elect First Transgender Bishop in United States”*: <https://albertmohler.com/2021/05/10/briefing-5-10-21>

Reference 56 – Quote from reformation scholar Heiko Oberman in his book ***Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*** (English edition Yale, 1989), as re-quoted in the article from Elesha Coffman from ***Christian History*** entitled *“What Luther Said”*:  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-luther-said.html>

Reference 57 - WCF 20.2, September 01, 2013, Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 20: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience:  
<https://dailywestminster.wordpress.com/2013/09/01/wcf-20-2/>

Reference 58 - There are 46 references to the word ***Conscience*** thought in the Augsburg Confession: <https://els.org/beliefs/augsburgconfession/#articleXVIII>



# ELCA's Position on Universalism

## What the ELCA says

- Bishop Eaton proclaimed in a 2023 letter to The Nazareth Church Council in Cedar Falls IA <sup>59</sup>:
  - "This universal promise of the gospel, proclaimed by Scripture and taught by the Lutheran Confessions, gives great hope and joy to Christians. It engenders a confident trust in God- that is, a living faith. Out of this joyful confidence in God, and trusting in the promise of God's mercy in Christ, **I and many Christians, hope that at the end of time God will redeem all things, including all humankind in the new heaven and new earth that is promised (Revelation 21:1-5).** This hope based in the universal scope of Christ's saving work is not universalism – a belief based on a philosophical idea rather than a confident trust in God's free promise in Jesus Christ."

## What the Bible has to say

- The Doctrine of Universalism is a concept that assumes no one will be judged and everyone will go to "Heaven" - **the Bible is clear that hell exists for Sinners and Non-Believers** - See the following:
  - Matthew 10:28
  - Luke 12:5
  - Matthew 5:22
  - Matthew 10:28
  - Matthew 11:23
  - Luke 16:22-23
  - 2 Peter 2:4-6
  - Revelation 20:13-15
- **In Revelation 21:1-5 (referred to in the Bishop's letter), everyone in attendance inherits eternal life: However, judgment occurs in Revelation 20:11-15, and the only people remaining were those whose names were written in the book of life**

Reference 59 - ELCA Presiding Bishop's response letter to Nazareth church after they sent her a letter (Nov 2022) requesting she recant her actions/words that supported a Universalism concept:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20230221175511/https://www.naz.org/files/ugd/c73759\\_f9f59b9140cc4bda9bf23c311e6a6487.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20230221175511/https://www.naz.org/files/ugd/c73759_f9f59b9140cc4bda9bf23c311e6a6487.pdf)

# ELCA's Position on Universalism

## What the ELCA says

- In 2019 the ELCA passed "A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment" <sup>60</sup> "This newly-adopted inter-faith policy statement asserts there are limits of our knowing the way to God the Father"
  - The Document states "God has revealed God's attitude toward us, overall purpose, and character, but the inner workings of God remain hidden. Hence, we must be careful about claiming to know God's judgments regarding another religion or the individual human beings who practice it" <sup>61</sup>
  - Pastor Jennifer Chrien (SW California Synod) spoke at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly supporting this document, stating "Our God is big enough for our family to include all of these interfaith siblings. Our God is big enough to admit that we do not know everything there is to know." <sup>62</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- John 14:6-7 (NIV) - "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'"
- These statements/document are inconsistent with scripture as this declaration uses a Universal approach to faith - "Christian universalism" is not Biblical
- "We have clear statements from Jesus, who is fully God and fully man".... "We do therefore have a basis to know God's views on religions that do not require faith in Jesus Christ as God's son." <sup>63</sup>

Reference 60 - ELCA Document, "A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment":  
[https://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Policy-Statement?\\_ga=2.165702526.1503683306.1680363120-1053687739.1679521838](https://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Policy-Statement?_ga=2.165702526.1503683306.1680363120-1053687739.1679521838)" – Page 14 is the paragraphs on the "Limits on our knowing"

Reference 61 - Chelsen Vicari, author of the 12 Aug 2019 article from the *Juicy Ecumenism: The Institute on Religion & Democracy's Blog* entitled "ELCA Goes Universalist?":  
<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/08/12/elca-goes-universalist/>  
Link also contains a video from the Aug 2019 Churchwide Assembly for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America showing some of the discussion and vote around this Declaration



# ELCA's Position on Universalism

## What the ELCA says

- According to a magazine article in the ELCA *Living Lutheran* by Winston D. Persaud, professor of systematic theology and director of the Center for Global Theologies at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa
  - “Lutheran theology accepts the reality of hell. We aren’t called to judge who is going to hell, **nor should we allow the fear of hell to determine how we live.** The creeds and Lutheran Confessions proclaim that Christ descended into hell and destroyed it for all believers. Wholly, by God’s grace alone, Christ has snatched us from the jaws of evil and the “gates of hell” will not prevail against our election. **We need not fear hell. We need not strive to earn our way to heaven by being good people.”** <sup>62</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- Lutherans believe **a person is saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone**
- Revelation 20:12-15 (NIV) - “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Reference 62 – Winston D. Persaud and Ann L. Fritschel, who co-authored on 27 Mar 2017 an article from *ELCA Living Lutheran* entitled ‘Pondering eternity, heaven and hell’:  
<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/03/pondering-eternity-heaven-hell/>



# ELCA's Position on Universalism

## What the ELCA says

- March of 2018, Bishop Eaton was directly asked: "Is there a hell?" To which our presiding Bishop responded:
  - "There may be, but I think it is empty." When asked a follow up question: "Why?" Bishop Eaton's response was "Jesus was clear" in the Bible that after he was "raised up he will draw all people to himself."<sup>63</sup>

## What the Bible has to say

- John 14:6 (NIV) - "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- John 3:36 (NIV) - "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."
- Revelation 21:8 (NIV) - "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."
- Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV) - "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Reference 63 - Robert Herguth, author of the 07 May 2018 article from the **Chicago Sun Times** entitled "Top Lutheran bishop: If hell exists, 'I think it's empty'":  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2018/3/7/18372814/top-lutheran-bishop-if-hell-exists-i-think-it-s-empty>



## Next Steps

- Please review this material and continue to do your reading/research for yourself
- The Council requests your Prayers and Patience - We welcome and need your input - If you are willing and able to help, please contact a Church Council member, and/or come to a Council Meeting
- The Council believes that continued evaluation is needed by the Congregation and Council, and a second in-person meeting will be held after we meet with the Bishop

**Practice active patience** as we await Christ's Return -- Isaiah 40:31 "but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

Closing

## Any last Questions?

The minutes will be sent out to all Church members shortly after the meeting

Remember, at any time you can give your comments/questions to any Council Member or eMail to  
[office@oslclarimore.org](mailto:office@oslclarimore.org)

Let's Pray

OUR SAVIOR'S  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
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