

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ELCA

To those who may use this report:

We often hear most about the topic of lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships within the ELCA and possibly because of this it is often perceived as the main issue. A group of us in our congregation who were concerned about the ELCA's interpretation of Scripture in this area decided to look at other areas that we also care about (but it is in no way considered to be a complete list of concerns). Each one of these items in the "ELCA Accepted/Tolerated Teachings" column uses sources straight from the ELCA, some of which have been removed from their website since this document was created. We kept an open mind as much as possible during this research, giving them the benefit of the doubt on any negative facts until it could be proved or disproved using ELCA documents.

We felt that it was very important to share what we found with our congregation, and you too may be surprised at what the ELCA believes, or does *not* believe. We told them that if this is what we believe, there should be no further issues, but if it is *not* what we believe, then we need to develop a plan of action to affiliate with those that share our beliefs. We invited the congregation to review this and spend time with God to reflect upon what the ELCA teaches, the Scriptures, and ask themselves this question: ***"Is this also what I believe?"***

After completing this document here are just a few of things we realized: 1) There is "official" doctrine and "unofficial" doctrine within the ELCA, and this often means conflicting, co-existing doctrine. This is apparent through how they carefully make a distinction between beliefs of "this church" (i.e. ELCA) which represents the "official" doctrine, and beliefs of the "members" which represents the "unofficial" doctrine. In most of the documents referenced here, there are references to the members' beliefs that are contained in the former "Digging Deeper" section of their website, in the social statements, etc. and it ranges from informational and less prominent doctrine to those that carry weight in the ELCA. We would argue that when the beliefs of "members" are recognized to the point of changing church policy (e.g. the ordination of those in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships) and/or no church discipline is enacted as a result of not following "official" doctrine, that this in itself makes a statement that it is what "this church" believes and obviously tolerates. According to Mark 3:25 when a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand. 2) Above all, the main issue is a very low view of Scripture and all other issues fall under that as an umbrella--the same-gender issue was simply what first caught everyone's attention and made us dig deeper.

Our prayer was that the eyes of the congregation would be opened and this is our prayer for others that view this as well!

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Category	ELCA Accepted/Tolerated teachings	Scripture (NIV)	Exposed Reality
The Bible	<p>"This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life." [A]</p> <p>The ELCA believes "God inspired many writers, editors, and compilers" but they "were limited by their times and world views". Writers "sometimes provide differing and even contradictory views of God's word, ways, and will." In the Bible we find "human emotion, testimony, opinion, cultural limitation and bias". The "authority of the Bible rests in God...by no means does that human presence in the sacred Scripture detract from the Bible's testimony to God." Although the early manuscripts were "remarkable in their agreement and accuracy, sometimes - though mostly in minor matters" there were mistakes and the "texts do not agree among themselves". [B]</p>	<p><u>2 Timothy 3:16</u> "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." <u>2 Peter 1:20-21</u> "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." <u>2 Samuel 22:31</u> says that ..."the word of the Lord is flawless" along with <u>Psalms 12:6</u> "And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."</p>	<p>It should be noted that the ELCA's constitution and other documents do not recognize the Bible as the "inerrant" Word of God, i.e. without error. The ELCA's view is that God inspired writers but they had limitations and therefore it contains many contradictions and marks of humanity but that doesn't take away from the Bible's testimony to God. This is in itself a contradiction--if one believes it contains contradictions doesn't this <i>take away from</i> the testimony of God and how can it be <i>useful for teaching</i> as in 2 Timothy 3:16 if it can't be trusted to be consistent? Scripture's view is that men were carried along by the Holy Spirit and not by their own will, and that it was God-breathed and flawless. It should also be noted that the additional subjects cited in this table all follow in one way or another from the ELCA's questioning of the authority of the Bible.</p>
Salvation	<p><u>Regarding those who never heard or DO NOT BELIEVE, "Will only Christians be saved?"</u>[C]:</p> <p>"There is a universalist thrust in the New Testament...Because Jesus is the unique and universal savior, there is a large hope for salvation, not only for me and others with proper credentials of believing and belonging to the church, but for all people whenever or wherever they might have lived and no matter how religious or irreligious they may have proved to be themselves. It is clearly God's announced will that all people shall be saved and come to knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4)."</p> <p>Caution is given to those who passionately argue that grace & salvation to all must be accepted "with deep repentance and a change of life." The ELCA also states, "We do not...know the answer."</p> <p>"Jesus includes in salvation people who do not believe in him or ever know about him." [D]</p>	<p>In <u>John 14:6</u> Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." In <u>Luke 13:3</u> Jesus said, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." In <u>John 3:16</u> Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." <u>Romans 10:9</u> says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In <u>Acts 4:12</u>, Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."</p>	<p>The issue in this discussion is about those who <i>don't believe</i>. The ELCA's teachings favor universalism--the belief that everyone will be saved, even those that don't believe. Universalism is contrary to the Bible--there is no other way to be saved except through Jesus, and even though God's will is for everyone to be saved we still have free will to accept or reject that. <u>Mark 16:16</u> "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." <u>John 3:18</u> "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."</p>

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Virgin Birth	The official teaching is that of the "virginal conception" of Jesus, but the doctrinal debate remains open. Even though the phrase "born of the virgin Mary" is confessed in the Creeds the ELCA is "not making a gynecological assertion." [E]	<u>Isaiah 7:14</u> is fulfilled in <u>Matthew 1:23</u> "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." Also see <u>Luke 1:26-35</u> where Mary said, "How will this be...since I am a virgin?" <u>Matthew 1:18b</u> "...but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."	Scriptures say it happened through the Holy Spirit and that she was a virgin! Denying the virgin birth ignores these things: the divinity of Jesus (although they feel it doesn't matter if you believe in this as long as you believe in the resurrection), and that God is capable of doing this miracle. What is the ELCA's theory on Jesus' father if it was not a virginal conception?
Resurrection	Scholars wrote "that the risen Jesus (and apparitions of him) is a "supernatural reality which does not belong to this world and cannot be the object of historic investigation. Rather, Jesus resurrection is an object of faith." ELCA members believe that history "demonstrates the disciples' faith in the resurrection". "In John 20:29 it is faith in the resurrection, not the observation of the fact, which is blessed by Jesus." [F] "Most New Testament passages refer to the resurrection of believers, some to a general resurrection to eternal joy, some to eternal punishment...For ELCA members the resurrection that completes the victory over sin and death is not intended for Christians alone. Our understanding of the resurrection's significance for humanity is enhanced by Luke 14:14, 'You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous,' and when Jesus reminds us that "those who do what is true come to the light, that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God," (John 3:21) [F]	In <u>Luke 24:2-3</u> the women didn't find the body in the tomb and in verse 6 the women were told, "He is not here; he has risen! <u>1 Corinthians 15:12-23</u> says that if Christ has not been raised: preaching and faith are useless, the apostles were false witnesses, your faith is futile, we are not saved from sins, and those that died are lost. See also all of <u>Luke 24</u> , <u>John 20</u> through <u>John 21:1-14</u> .	Does the ELCA believe in the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus? Does the "faith in the resurrection, not the observation of the fact" mean that you don't necessarily have to believe that the tomb was empty just that He rose, i.e. a spiritual resurrection? Does the ELCA believe that resurrection for all means you just have to do what is right, not necessarily be a believer in Christ to go into "eternal joy" as they say? Prior to the John 3:21 reference is John 3:18 that says that you need to be a believer in God's one and only Son to have eternal life.
Abortion	The ELCA has "serious differences" on the issue of induced abortion [G]: "A developing life in the womb does not have an absolute right to be born, nor does a pregnant woman have an absolute right to terminate a pregnancy." The discussion must move beyond the usual "pro-life" versus "pro-choice" language. (p. 2) In "most circumstances" it encourages women with unwanted pregnancy to continue the pregnancy but it recognizes "sound reasons" for abortion and labels some cases as "morally responsible". (p. 6)	<u>Psalms 139:13-16</u> talks about God creating and knowing us in the womb and how "your eyes saw my unformed body." <u>Exodus 20:13</u> "You shall not murder." See also <u>Matthew 5:21</u> , <u>Jer. 1:5</u> , <u>Isaiah 40:26</u> , <u>Luke 1:41</u> , <u>Acts 17:24-25</u> , and <u>Genesis 9:5-6</u> .	According to Psalm 139, human life exists in the womb even as an "unformed body". They believe a developing life in the womb has <i>no right to be born</i> (before abortion laws these lives had rights) and they do not take a solid stand for the life of a child especially when unfortunate circumstances of conception exist. The ELCA opposes outlawing abortion in all circumstances [G]. The true test of what the ELCA believes: THE ELCA HEALTH PLAN PAYS FOR ANY AND ALL ABORTIONS FOR PASTORS, THEIR FAMILIES AND OTHER CHURCH EMPLOYEES (the ELCA rejected putting any restrictions on any reasons for abortion but does have some limitations after 20 wks. of pregnancy) [H].

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Marriage	<p>The official teaching is that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman.[I]</p> <p>It also recognizes some ELCA members' convictions that marriage also describes similar benefits, protection, and support for those in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships even though this conclusion goes against "Christian tradition" and the Lutheran Confessions. Civil unions are also accepted. [J]</p>	<p>Jesus said in Mark 10:6-9, "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. '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." See also Genesis 2:23-24.</p>	<p>The ELCA has altered the Biblical definition of marriage and accepts going against the Lutheran Confessions. Jesus defines marriage as between a man and a woman so the following things regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships are contrary to the Bible: the church's public recognition of the relationship, and without this public recognition a person in this type of relationship can't be ordained [K], and it allows sexual activity and cohabitation outside of marriage [L].</p>
Sexuality	<p><u>Conflicting messages on the impact of our sexual behavior:</u></p> <p>It is not "purely a personal matter, but one that affects the witness of the Christian community and the well-being of the larger community." One of the Biblical references cited here (Revelation 21:8) referred to those that fall into the sexually immorality category as being thrown into the lake of fire. [M]</p> <p>"Therefore, we believe that the way we order our lives in matters of human sexuality is important to faithful living, but is not central to determining our salvation. We are able to be realistic and merciful with respect to our physical and emotional realities, not striving for angelic perfection as if our salvation were at stake." [N]</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 6:20 says that we are to honor God with our body, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says that those in sexual sins will not inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 says that God will punish sexual sins, and rejecting this instruction rejects, not man, but God, who gives the Holy Spirit; and Revelation 21:8 says that the sexually immoral will be thrown into the lake of fire.</p>	<p>These two ELCA conflicting messages are contained within the same document. Even though perfect sexual behavior cannot merit our way to eternal life, our misbehavior in this area DOES impact our eternal salvation according to Scriptures. It is an issue of salvation in this sense and therefore can't be combined into the same category as Romans 14, i.e. "bound conscience", which the ELCA uses as a foundation for accepting the recognition and ordination of lifelong, monogamous, same-gender couples. In reference to ELCA's bound conscience, some believe Martin Luther's famous statement before the Diet of Worms regarding conscience meant that his conscience was bound to the <i>Scriptures</i> not to the conscience as in one's <i>personal beliefs</i> as portrayed by the ELCA's Task Force on Sexuality [O].</p>
Lifelong, Monogamous, Same-Gender Relationships	<p><u>These four members' convictions are recognized [P]:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This behavior is sinful and contrary to the Bible. 2. It's not what God intended but part of life, and it's not equal with marriage. 3. Scriptures don't address these relationships the way we know them today. It should be recognized & supported but not equal with marriage. 4. These relationships are equal with marriage. 	<p>Leviticus 18:22 Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Romans 1:26-27 refers to shameful lusts such as women exchanging natural relations with unnatural ones and being inflamed with lust for one another (and men doing the same with other men). See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, Leviticus 20:13, Genesis 19:1-11, Judges 19:16-30.</p>	<p>The ELCA tolerates conflicting beliefs. Recognizing these relationships as marriage is against Scripture (Mark 10:6-9) and the Lutheran Confessions [J]. THE ELCA WILL BE ADDING PENSION AND OTHER BENEFIT COVERAGE FOR THE PARTNERS OF THOSE CLERGY AND STAFF IN THIS TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP and will "treat an eligible same-gender partner the same as we treat a spouse of the extent possible under each plan, and as permitted by federal law." [Q]</p>

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As a congregation, it is imperative that we consider a few things:

1. The ELCA and our own Synod frequently remind us to "love our neighbor" and this is most certainly true according to Matthew 5:44 and John 13:34-35 to name a few. We are told that it is *not* loving our neighbors when we question the accepted doctrines within the ELCA that differ from our own beliefs. We are asked to accept and respect multiple and sometimes completely opposite teachings on the same topic. The logic of this situation is that one of them has to be contrary to Scripture and we are accepting and tolerating these beliefs within our midst. Should it not be considered more loving of your neighbor to minister and evangelize what you believe to be the true meaning of Scripture? "We are not called to judge one another. God does call us, however, to judge doctrine. Those are two very different things...To judge someone else's doctrine is to point where his or her teaching is in conflict with God's Word. To judge someone's doctrine with a humble attitude is an act of compassion. Christ's love motivates us to intentionally help people get set free from the slavery that accompanies false doctrine. [R]"
2. This is what Scripture warns us about regarding doctrine: 1 Timothy 4:3 says "For the time will come when men 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."
3. Do we share the same beliefs as the doctrines of the ELCA, as shown in some of the sample topics above? If we agree with the ELCA's doctrine, we need to continue in the ELCA. If we disagree with the ELCA's doctrine, have we come to the time that is spoken of in 1 Timothy 4:3? And if so, this may lead us to decide that it is best to affiliate with a different Lutheran denomination and we need to consider the possible next steps as: first checking our church constitution to insure that we can keep our church building; developing a task force to: educate the congregation on the issues and gauge their response, gather information on Lutheran denominations that match those Biblical doctrines supported by our congregation, and make recommendations to our council and/or congregation. Eventually this will lead to taking congregational votes leading us to that new affiliation.

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A	ELCA Constitution dated 08-09, p. 19
B	This paragraph is summarized from "The Bible" taken from https://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Bible.aspx which was removed from the website after this document was produced. Contact us for a copy.
C	Except otherwise noted, this section was summarized from "Salvation" found at http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Salvation.aspx which was removed from the website after this document was produced. Contact us for a copy.
D	The Augsburg Fortress Lutheran Study Bible (first printing) study note in Matthew 28:16-20 p. 1658. See also notes on Matthew 5:3-10 and 25:31-45. This Bible is funded and produced by the ELCA.
E	"Virgin Birth" is summarized from http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Virgin-Birth.aspx which was removed from the website after this document was produced. Contact us for a copy.
F	"The Resurrection" is summarized from http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Resurrection.aspx?elca_printpage=1 which was removed from the website after this document was produced. Contact us for a copy.
G	ELCA's "A Social Statement on Abortion" http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Abortion.aspx
H	ELCA News Service 2/26/97 "Board Excludes Late-Term Abortion Coverage" and ELCA News Service 8/20/97 "ELCA Assembly Rebuffs Attempts to Limit Abortion Coverage"
I	"Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 9. Note that this is the "official" doctrine. See Note J and related information.
J	"Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 10. It is important to understand that the ELCA is clear that this represents "member's beliefs" and not official doctrine--it is what we consider "unofficial" doctrine in practice that carries as much weight as official doctrine. For example, as a result of Church-wide Assembly 2009 policy was changed to grant those in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships the same treatment as a spouse for the purpose of ELCA benefits to the extent permitted by law. See Note Q.
K	"Report & Recommendations on Ministry Policies" from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality 2/19/09, p. 8, lines 327-334
L	"Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 17
M	This paragraph is summarized from "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 4.
N	This paragraph is summarized from "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 6
O	CORE Connection March 2009 p. 2, "Lutheran CORE leaders respond to task force recommendations", and also refer to Rev. Walter F. Taylor, Jr. Ph.D., 7/26/09 letter, "Dear Correspondents" p. 2 in reference to human conscience being elevated above Luther's understanding of being "bound in conscience by the Word of God".
P	This list is summarized from "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust": A Social Statement of the ELCA p. 11. It is important to understand that the social statement lists these four beliefs as "members' convictions" and not the beliefs of "this church." It should be noted that the ELCA makes a distinction between "this church" meaning the ELCA, and members' convictions. "This church" makes no biblical argument for or against these beliefs. We believe the ELCA <i>appears</i> to take a neutral position by allowing this at the congregational level, however, since it recognizes members' convictions to the point of changing church policy to allow recognition and ordination of same gender couples along with adding benefits equal to marriage as allowable by law, we believe this confirms what "this church" tolerates and/or believes. For additional reading see " <i>Conscience-bound Beliefs" Rule and the "Conscience-bound-belief" Rule</i> " by John R. Stumme which was published in the Journal of Lutheran Ethics, November 2010.
Q	ELCA News Service 3/3/10, "ELCA Board of Pensions Trustees Begin Process for Benefit Plan Changes"
R	Word Alone Network News, Jan./Feb. 2006, "Avoid broad road of doctrinal tolerance" by Pastor Dan Delzell, Trinity Lutheran Church, Papillion, Nebraska