

Teaching Document

In Support of

*A Resolution on the “Bound Conscience” of the South Carolina Synod
with Respect to Changes in Ministry Policies*

And

*A Resolution in Opposition to the Actions of the 2009 Churchwide
Assembly*

February 2010

Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina

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I. Opening Statement

Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light the following proposed resolution and this supporting brief will be discussed on February 6, 2010 at the Pre-Assembly gathering called “A Day of Holy Conversation” in Wiles Chapel at Newberry College.

The Church experiences God’s love, learns who God is and why God matters, and learns how to be in a proper relationship with God and with each other through God’s Word. It is unacceptable that the ELCA has rejected God’s love by rejecting God’s Word as it relates to homosexual behavior.

For thousands of years, since the Laws of Moses were written down, the Church has relied on the plain meaning of those passages of scripture which specifically address homosexual behavior. In relying on this plain meaning, the Church has consistently classified homosexual behavior as sinful.

In its idolatry, the ELCA has negated those passages of scripture which specifically address homosexual behavior in favor of its own definition of “love.” Instead of adhering to the definition of “love” as defined by God’s Word, the ELCA has officially adopted its own definition of “love” based on societal norms derived from personal experience and personal context.

Consequently, the ELCA has made itself into a false god and is committing idolatry. In doing so, the ELCA has violated its constitution and the constitution of the South Carolina Synod by rejecting God’s Word as the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

Many of our brothers and Sisters in Christ have been deceived by this false teaching. The following proposed resolution is a first step in calling our errant brothers and sisters into repentance and renewing the Church out of love by exercising our bound conscience in obedience to God’s Word.

II. History

- a. Since its inception, the ELCA Constitution has stated: *“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”* (ELCA Constitution 2.03).
- b. The South Carolina Synod of the ELCA has the identical language in its Constitution which states: *“This synod 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”* (SC Synod Constitution *S4.03).
- c. In 1990, the ELCA adopted *“Vision and Expectations”* governing the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of rostered leaders which states in part: ***“it is the policy of the ELCA that all single rostered people, including those who understand themselves to be homosexual, are expected to abstain from sexual relationships.”***
- d. In 1993, the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA stated that they did not approve an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of same-sex unions because they found no basis for it in the Word of God.
- e. In 2003, under the title *“Journey Together Faithfully Part II,”* the ELCA applied the historic approach to understanding scripture. These studies contrasted the historical understanding of scripture concerning homosexual behavior with a new understanding that tried to overcome the plain meaning of what is written. The new understanding was not persuasive and was defeated by a large margin at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.
- f. In 2005, the South Carolina Synod of the ELCA in its Assembly affirmed the continuing validity and value of marriage as an institution existing only between one man and one woman.
- g. In 2005, the South Carolina Assembly memorialized to the Churchwide ELCA Assembly a statement requesting the ELCA to maintain the standards for rostered leaders as outlined in *“Vision and Expectations.”*
- h. In November of 2006, the ELCA published a Third Study, *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality*. In this study, the ELCA teaches a new approach to scripture when defining sexual morality. Instead of being formed by those scripture passages that specifically address the issues in question, the ELCA relies on the general instruction *“to love your neighbor.”* This is convenient because it allows the ELCA to define sexual morality anyway it chooses by simply attaching its definition of *“love”* to the outcome it desires. Now, under its new unauthorized, self-serving authority to

define “love,” the ELCA can negate those specific passages of scripture that define God’s love as it relates to sexual morality. In doing so, the ELCA rejects God’s Word as the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life in favor of its own self-serving definition of “love.”

- i. The ELCA continued to teach this new idolatrous approach in 2008 when it published its proposed social statement entitled, *“Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.”* This social statement passed at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.
- j. Under its new self-serving idolatrous authority to define “love” outside of scripture, the ELCA adopted changes to its ministry policies concerning homosexual behavior and passed a resolution to implement those changes at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.
- k. In 2009, the South Carolina Synod Assembly in quasi-committee of the whole voted not to recommend to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly adoption of the social statement on human sexuality and not to recommend the change in ministry policies.
- l. In 2009, the South Carolina Assembly requested that the ELCA affirm its current ministry policies as expressed in *“Vision and Expectations”* and faithfully abide by them.

III. **“Respect the Bound Consciences of All”**

At the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted changes to its ministry policies concerning homosexual and lesbian behavior and passed a resolution to implement those changes. In both the ministry policy changes and subsequent implementing resolution, the ELCA calls **“upon its members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree”** and ***“respect the bound consciences of all.”***

“Consciences are bound only by a Commandment of God” (Luther’s Works 33:49). Some in the ELCA dispute Luther and argue that to “respect the bound consciences of all” means a person must internalize the oppositions argument to such an extent that it becomes their own. This is in direct conflict with Luther’s understanding because it makes consciences bound to each other instead of God’s Word. If Luther believed his conscience was bound to another’s conscience instead of to God’s Word, he would have recanted at the Diet of Worms.

No person, congregation, or Synod should acquiesce to, condone, or participate in behavior their bound conscience considers sinful and contrary to the Word of God. Many consider the disputed changes made at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to be idolatry. And, those who do believe they must

exercise their bound conscience by rejecting the changes made in order to reform the ELCA and show a path of repentance for those brothers and sisters in Christ who have been deceived by a false teaching.

The most effective way for congregations, their members, and their rostered leaders to begin reforming the idolatrous actions of the ELCA and call for repentance is through synodical legislative action. Therefore, in order to “respect the bound conscience of all,” it is essential for the above resolution to be voted on at the South Carolina Synod Assembly in June of 2010.

IV. The ELCA has Committed Idolatry

The current conflict in the ELCA is the result of idolatry. The ELCA’s new definition of sexual morality, as it relates to homosexual behavior, is only a symptom of this idolatry.

The historical approach to interpreting scripture begins with the plain meaning of what is written. The presumption is in favor of the plain meaning of what is written, and the burden is on those who want to change the plain meaning to prove their argument and overcome the presumption. The general rule is: The more elaborate the interpretation becomes to overcome the plain meaning, the less persuasive the argument to overcome is.

The burden to overcome the presumption can be met through biblical scholarship using such tools as rhetorical criticism, textual criticism, and historical criticism. Through such scholarship, it may become clear that the language in question is best understood as sarcastic, ironic, or metaphoric. Moreover, a study of history may prove scripture has a hidden political message in its intentionally ambiguous apocalyptic images.

However, God’s Word is meant to be read by all people in all times, so it is not necessary to have a PhD in biblical studies to interpret most of scripture. As a result, biblical scholarship often fails in its attempt to overcome the presumption in favor of the plain meaning of what is written because the arguments presented are not persuasive. This is the case with those who initially tried to overcome the plain meaning of God’s Word as it relates to homosexual behavior.

In 2003, under the title “Journey Together Faithfully Part II,” the ELCA applied the historic approach to interpreting scripture. These studies contrasted the historical understanding of scripture concerning homosexual behavior with a new understanding that tried to overcome the plain meaning of what is written. The new understanding was not persuasive and was defeated by a large margin at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

In the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the opposition failed by reason, biblical scholarship, and theological thought to overcome the plain meaning of scripture as it relates to homosexual behavior. After their defeat, the opposition began proclaiming a new approach to interpreting scripture designed to overcome the plain meaning of God's Word by simply negating it.

Instead of being formed by those scripture passages that specifically address homosexual behavior, the opposition began teaching reliance on the general instruction "to love." This new approach was initially taught in November of 2006 when the ELCA published its Third Study, *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality*. The ELCA continued to teach this new approach in 2008 when it published its proposed social statement entitled, "*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*."

For example, in the third study the ELCA writes:

*Each of us sees life and matters of sexuality through "lenses" that are fitted by our particular life experiences and by cultural influences.... If we agree that we do indeed see things through a variety of lenses, is the "gospel lens" - whether or not a given view enhances our **freedom in Christ to serve the neighbor in love**- sufficient to make discerning judgments in a "spirit of gentleness?" (Galatians 6:1). Looking through the gospel lens at the issues of cultural challenges..., **is it possible that Christian sexual ethics may need to undergo some new interpretations in order to be faithful to the true spirit of Christian love in today's world?** (Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutheran Talk about Human Sexuality, pages 68-69.)*

In its third study, the ELCA presents its thesis for overcoming God's love, as found in God's Commandments, by negating those commandments in favor of its own definition of love. In its social statement, the ELCA adopts this idolatrous thesis stating:

*"The social statement addresses the questions: how do we understand human sexuality within the context of Jesus' invitation to love God and **love our neighbor**.... Therefore, this social statement seeks to assist this church **in discerning what best serves the neighbor in the complexity of human relationships and social needs in the midst of daily life.**" (Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust lines 12-14 and lines 384-387.)*

In both documents, the ELCA instructs the reader to define "sexual morality" based on the commandment to "love your neighbor." This allows the definition of sexual morality to become a moving target based on the Church's definition of what it looks like to "love your neighbor." Under this new unauthorized, self-serving authority to define "love," the ELCA can overcome those scripture passages it does not like.

In love, God's Word instructs us on how to be in a proper relationship with God and with each other. Therefore, "neighborly love" is properly defined through those scriptures which teach us how to live in appropriate relationships. The ELCA rejects and fails to trust God's Word when it negates God's definition of "love" in favor of its own definition of "love." The ELCA officially adopted its own definition of "love" at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly by condoning homosexual behavior which is specifically condemned in scripture. In doing so, the ELCA, in violation of its constitution and the constitution of the South Carolina Synod, rejects God's Word as the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life in favor of its own self-serving definition of "love."

This is not just a slippery slope. This is a cliff that falls into the abyss of idolatry. Under this new idolatrous approach to scripture, we are taught to become little gods defining "love" however we see fit based on our own personal experiences and personal contexts. Over and over again at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly this proved to be true. Those who have been deceived shared their emotional stories of their personal experiences in support of their personal definition of "love" in hopes of negating God's Word as it relates to homosexual behavior.

These emotional stories were very moving and very effective. They successfully negated God's definition of "love" by condoning sinful relationships. This result was possible because of the new idolatrous approach which overcomes God's definition of "love" with the ELCA's definition of "love." This is idolatry and should be rejected and repudiated by passing the above proposed resolution at the South Carolina Synod Assembly in June of 2010.

V. In Order to be Faithful, Disunity Must Follow Idolatry

Exercising bound conscience in obedience to God's Word is more important than maintaining an outward, superficial façade of unity in the ELCA. Erasmus chastised Martin Luther for the uproar, disunity, and negative effect Luther's writings were having on the Church in Europe. Luther's response to Erasmus in "The Bondage of the Will" is as follows:

"You thus plainly show that outward peace and quietness are to you far more important than faith, conscience, salvation, the Word of God, the glory of Christ, and God himself. Let me tell you, therefore – and I beg you to let this sink deep into your mind – that what I am after in this dispute is to me something serious, necessary, and indeed eternal, something of such a kind and such importance that it ought to be asserted and defended to the death, even if the whole world had not only to be thrown into strife and confusion, but actually to return to total chaos and be reduced to nothingness" (Luther's Works 33:50).

The question is: Does this current dispute in the ELCA over idolatry rise to the same level of seriousness as the dispute in the reformation? ___

The answer is: It does. It does because the Word of God is no longer the authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life in the Church. Under the new idolatrous approach to scripture our members and our children will be taught false teachings, will be encouraged to commit sin, and will have withheld from them the path of repentance.

Under the ELCA's new idolatrous authority to define "love" anyway it chooses, the plain meaning of all scripture is in jeopardy. The sin of adultery can be negated under the argument that certain people are genetically predisposed to cheat on their spouse. God made them that way. They are a victim of their genetic predisposition, and it is not love to call them a sinner.

Similarly, the sin of fornication by a prostitute can be negated under the argument that the prostitute is a victim of her socioeconomic status. It is not love to call the prostitute a sinner because her need to sell herself is founded in the sin of others. Notice, that in this argument, which is fully supported by the ELCA's new approach to scripture, the ELCA can successfully negate the words of Jesus to the prostitute "Go on your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11).

Now, sinners can be self-justified in their sin by the false teachings of the Church. These false teachings withhold the path of repentance allowing sinners to separate themselves further from God. This result is serious and involves "faith, conscience, salvation, the Word of God, the glory of Christ, and God himself." As a result, exercising bound conscience in opposition to the unconstitutional, idolatrous actions of the ELCA is more important than maintaining an outward, superficial façade of unity.

VI. The Proposed Resolution is in Order

The proposed resolution is in order because the South Carolina Synod has the right to vote its "bound conscience" in opposition to the idolatrous actions of the ELCA and has the right to correct the ELCA's unconstitutional actions through the synod's legislative authority. In fact, the only proper way for the South Carolina Synod to repudiate, reject, and not participate in the idolatrous, unconstitutional actions of the ELCA is through its legislative authority. _

A synod assembly is an assembly primarily composed of the voting delegates of the congregations and their rostered leaders. There is no greater disrespect to "bound conscience" than to take away the assembly's right to vote at the highest level of legislative authority on the issue of idolatry which has resulted in unconstitutional action. In fact such a decision would be unconstitutional,

“the powers of the Synod Assembly are limited only by the provisions in the Articles of Incorporation, this constitution and bylaws, the assembly’s own resolutions, and the constitutions and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”(SC Synod Constitution *S7.01.).

There is nothing in the organizational or operating documents of the ELCA or South Carolina Synod which precludes or limits delegates from voting their bound conscience at Synod Assembly on the issue of idolatry. Therefore, it would be unconscionable and unconstitutional to disenfranchise the voting delegates by limiting their rights to vote at the 2010 South Carolina Synod Assembly against the ELCA’s idolatry.

Furthermore, synods have the right to exercise their “bond conscience” to decide for themselves whether scripture condemns homosexual behavior as sin. Consequently, any policies and guidelines coming out of the ELCA limiting synodical response are not authoritative. They are only advisory in their understanding and application because the national church does not have centralized authority over the issues in question. Rather, authority has been vested in the synods to make their own determinations on how to apply scripture to homosexual behavior and how it relates to ordination and same sex unions.

a. **Ordination:**

Synods are in charge of approving candidates for ordained ministry, authorizing ordinations, ordaining on behalf of the church, approving associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers. (SC Synod Constitution *S6.03. a.)

At the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted 4 Recommendations on Ministry Policies (CA09.05.23; CA09.05.24; CA09.05.26; and CA09.05.27).

CA09.05.23 states *“that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another’s burdens, love the neighbor, **and respect the bound consciences of all**”* (bold added).

CA09.05.27, in the 2nd “RESOLVED” states *“that this church, because of its commitment to respect the bound consciences of all, declare its intent **to allow structured flexibility in decision-making regarding the approving or disapproving in candidacy and the extending or not extending of a call to rostered service** of a person who is otherwise qualified and who is living or contemplates living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship”* (bold added).

The 5th “WHEREAS” introducing CA.09.05.27 states, “*other members, congregations, candidacy committees, **and synods** of the ELCA acknowledge those gifts and skills for ministry, but believe that this church must maintain an expectation of celibacy for any gay or lesbian person, whether or not that person is in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, and thus believe that this church cannot call or roster people in such relationships*” (bold added).

The use of “structured flexibility” is portrayed in the “Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies” as presented to the Churchwide Assembly on lines 488 – 498 of the Pre-Assembly Report in the following manner: “*To choose **structured flexibility** does not imply that same-gender-oriented people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships would be able to serve everywhere in this church. The existing discernment processes for approval and call already assume that **synods, bishops, candidacy committees, rostered leaders, and congregations will make decisions in keeping with their own conscience and convictions. If structured flexibility were added to the process, this assumption would still protect any congregation, candidacy committee, synod, or bishop from having to violate bound conscience by approving, calling, commissioning, consecrating, or ordaining anyone in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.** Similarly, a structured flexibility process would protect the decisions of a congregation, candidacy committee, synod, or bishop who concludes that mission would be served best by approving or calling a particular candidate or rostered leader who is in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship*” (bold added).

Consequently, it is evident from these portions of the materials adopted and presented at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly that the “all” whose “bound conscience” the actions of the assembly have committed the ELCA to honor include “synods.” And, that through a synod’s “bound conscience” it may decide not to approve, call, commission, consecrate, or ordain someone who is engaged in the sin of homosexual behavior.

The South Carolina Synod has already exercised its bound conscience as it relates to homosexual behavior. In 2005, the South Carolina Assembly memorialized to the Churchwide ELCA Assembly a statement requesting the ELCA to maintain the standards for rostered leaders as outlined in “*Vision and Expectations.*” In 2009, the South Carolina Assembly requested that the ELCA affirm its current ministry policies as expressed in “*Vision and Expectations*” and faithfully abide by them.

Therefore, the proposed resolution is in order and the South Carolina Synod has the right to exercise its “bound conscience” as it relates to its

understanding of scripture as applied to the ordination of those engaged in the sin of homosexual behavior.

b. Same Sex Unions:

A Synod in the ELCA has the right to maintain its will and actions as it relates to its understanding of scripture as applied to same sex unions.

In 2005, the South Carolina Synod Assembly affirmed the continuing validity and value of marriage as an institution existing only between one man and one woman. In 2009, the South Carolina Synod Assembly in quasi-committee of the whole voted not to recommend to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly adoption of the social statement on human sexuality and not to recommend the change in ministry policies.

The Pre-Assembly report relied on by the delegates at Churchwide assembly acknowledges the right of synods to maintain the traditional understanding of scripture and the Lutheran Confessions which condemn homosexual behavior as a sin and clearly state that marriage in the eyes of God is only between one man and one woman.

In Part IV (lines 620-628 in the Pre-Assembly Report to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly) it reads: *“The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10:6-9: “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.”* (Jesus here recalls Genesis 1:27;2:23-24).

In Part IV (lines 740-744, as amended, of the Pre-Assembly Report) it reads: *“Recognizing that this conclusion differs from the historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions, some people, though not all, in this church and within the larger Christian community, conclude that marriage is also the appropriate term to use in describing similar benefits, protection, and support for same-gender couples entering into lifelong monogamous relationships.”* The statement then goes on to treat these two positions and the variants within them as of equal validity, on the basis of the “conscience-bound beliefs” of those who hold them (Part IV, lines 809-868 of the Pre-Assembly Report).

Therefore, the proposed resolution is in order and the South Carolina Synod has the right to maintain its will and actions as it relates to its understanding of scripture as applied to same sex unions by voting on the

proposed resolution which repudiates and rejects the untraditional, unconstitutional, and idolatrous actions of the ELCA.

VII. **Closing Statement**

In love, the South Carolina Synod has the opportunity to be a light of hope to other Synods and their congregations. A positive vote on the proposed resolution indicates that reform from within is possible. Instead of distancing ourselves from the ELCA, it is time to stand up and fight for God's Word and for this Church we love. The ELCA has committed idolatry and has violated its constitution and the constitution of the South Carolina Synod. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have come to believe in a false teaching that allows them to define "love" as they see fit in order to overcome the plain meaning of God's Word. In humility and love the Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina call the Church to repentance and pray for the ELCA to return to its mission which is to do God's will in obedience to God's Word.