

The next phase of conversation is beginning within the ELCA regarding a social statement on Human Sexuality and the Task Force's Report & Recommendations on Ministry Policies. Whatever appears now is offered for further discussion, conversation, revision, amendment, deletion, approval or rejection as they are both discussed within congregations, the Vocations and Education Unit of the ELCA, the Conference of Bishops, the ELCA Church Council, the 65 Synod Assemblies in their spring and summer assemblies, and the Churchwide Assembly in August. We have months of conversation before us. We will not have a direction determined until a possible vote at our Churchwide Assembly in August 2009.

The Task Force has now been dissolved having completed its work, and in April 2009 the ELCA Church Council will offer a final proposed Social Statement to the whole church to continue to consider and work through ongoing amendments or deletions in the coming months for consideration at the upcoming 2009 Churchwide Assembly

I would encourage people to begin with the Executive Summary as an overview, but then to read the entire social statement and report and recommendations. Rather than counting on others quick or impassioned summaries, let each of us carefully read and prayerfully consider the contents.

A first reading of the Social Statement reveals again the great length of the material. It also reflects by the appearance of new words and phrases that comments and suggestions from across the church have been heard and used by the Task Force.

The Report that precedes the Recommendations reveals a task force that has been listening to the people across this church. The Task Force recommends a four step process that provides an order to our decision making. The first step is the decisive consideration for this church. It asks whether this church, "in principle, is committed to finding ways to allow congregations and synods that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable life-long monogamous, same-gender relationships." The language offered to the church is not 'blessed' but 'recognized,' relationships that are 'publicly held accountable,' by a community of faith that would surround and support them. The Task Force brings to the church a new round for circles of prayerful discernment through careful consideration and thoughtful conversation.

Bishop Mauney