

Being created in God's image (*imago dei*), we believe that all human beings bear this image in many and various ways. Because members of the LGBTQ community are often marginalized and sometimes persecuted in the name of God, it is necessary for us to bear Christian witness to defend and advocate for all whom God created.

Within Christendom (and other world religions), there exists an unhealthy framework of assumptions and accusations. We, the undersigned leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, proclaim that many Christians do not accept a rigid and hateful perspective on persons identifying as transgender, but rather welcome them as part of God's family.

Humans are prone to making erroneous judgement in our time based on selective biblical interpretation. Few Christians recognize the biblical admonitions against eating pork (Leviticus 11). Nor do we order the destruction of a building if it has mold for more than three consecutive days (Leviticus 14). We can be, however, tempted to lift other ancient admonitions out of their original historical and cultural contexts to create standards of living if they suit our current ideological agendas.

ELCA Lutherans are guided by a 2009 social statement against such thinking: "theology prepares us precisely to hold in creative tension the paradoxes and complexities of the human situation. This is also the case with regard to human sexuality." Sometimes, the defining binaries (male/female, black/white, rich/poor) are simplistic and reductionist. In fact, we live in a world of continuums in which all of God's people are found. When we speak of defining characteristics of the human experience such as skin color, gender identity/expression, anatomical sex assigned at birth, romantic/sexual attraction, and personal identity, it reveals to us the incredibly diverse and mysterious beauty of God's creation.

It is our reading of the Holy Scriptures that God hates nothing God lovingly creates, and there is much more diversity in this world than we at first assume. We strive to view the world through the lens of God's love for creation, taking seriously the idea that we can love because God first loved us (1 John 4:10). What does God ask of us but to show the love of Christ in seeking to understand those who are different from us as equal partners in life and love? ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton focused on this love in a recent statement on Anti-Transgender Legislation: "Our church teaches that we affirm transgender and nonbinary siblings as God's children, who are loved unconditionally. Our social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019) also declares that this church commits itself to 'advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them.'"

We all seek love and respect and acceptance in our human struggles. While it is true that none of us choose the sex we are assigned at birth, it is possible for different expressions of sexuality and gender to exist in the human experience. Instead of shaming people for these different expressions, we can welcome them as God's children in an ever-changing universe.

We affirm public leaders who choose diversity over exclusion, especially on behalf of adolescent members of the LGBTQ community who face increasing threats and incidents of bullying in real spaces and online. By making a public stand in favor of diversity, we offer hope for LGBTQ youth that this is a world in which they can find love and acceptance.

Signed,

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