

Synod 2017 Study Commission Report:

Discussion document on Homosexuality Feedback from the congregations

a) To the biblical-theological part

Response varied from total rejection of the document's approach, to appreciation of its theological thoroughness. No specific theological critiques or suggestions to change have been made.

Some say, the fact that Bible texts calls homosexuality an “abomination” cannot be argued away and therefore further discussion is disobedience against God.

Some have seen the first part as an attempt to “discredit” the authority of the Bible.

There is a critique that the argument has a foregone conclusion.

It was pointed out that there is no unanimity in how people understand “the Lutheran” approach to scripture whereas the document gives the impression that there is.

Appreciation about a new and different way to understand texts was expressed by many people, also by people directly affected.

For some it opened up new meaning in biblical tradition and a new understanding of the texts in question.

The underlying, ongoing tension is about different understandings of the authority and interpretation of scripture.

b) To the scientific part

Feedback varied from appreciation for the scientific evidence given, to a critique that it was one-sided and superficial, and that opposing evidence was ignored.

Some questioned in principle the use of human reason and scientific evidence as important factors in Christian decision-making. Others supported the importance of listening to science, but said that the scientific evidence is divided and that there have been studies showing the harm of a homosexual lifestyle, and that a change in orientation is possible. However, no scientific material was forwarded in support of this critique. The drafting team did not

themselves find such credible scientific studies in their searches. The studies that were found were all critiqued by other articles as not sound in their methods (a more detailed report on this is available from G. Tönsing).

Some came to a new understanding of the issue through the scientific evidence presented. Supportive feedback came from church members who are practicing doctors and psychologists. Some people sent further supporting articles and research findings, which all went in the same direction as that presented in the document.

c) To the conclusions

Obviously, with the vast spectrum of opinion on the above two sections, the responses to the conclusion also varied from total rejection, to appreciation and acceptance. It is clear that the spectrum of opinion in our church stretches through all five positions outlined in the document itself. Some people were confronted for the first time with the possibility of a position other than rejection and made it clear that they needed much more time to think about it. It was encouraging to see many people in our church willing to discuss the issue openly and to listen to positions other than their own. However in many congregations there were also those who felt that even to be open to discussion was a betrayal of their Christian values. The discussion process needs more time and it would be premature and divisive to force a decision at this stage. We hope that the discussion can continue in a spirit of trust and respect for the Christian convictions of those with different opinions. The document will need some reworking, particularly of the scientific part and the study commission requests interested people to submit suggestions or material.

The study commission recommends to the ELCSA (N-T) Synod that more time should be granted for further deliberations on the topic of the discussion paper, as the feedback received by the study commission has shown that church members are divided in regards to this topic and thus need more time and opportunity to personally work through it.

Study Commission 2015 – 2017:

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