

Report to Synod 2019 from the Theological Study Commission on Homosexuality

The Theological Study Commission of ELCSA (N-T) has gathered comments on the discussion paper from congregations and individuals. In the previous synod an amended version was presented. Since then no further suggestions were received or changes made. The discussion paper posted on the ELCSA (N-T) website therefore remains the final version of the document under discussion and does not need to be sent out again. The Study Commission requests Synod to declare its work as completed, and to dissolve the working group that has been writing on this particular issue. Pastors' conventions have requested that the composition of the Theological Study Commission be dependent on the topic under discussion.

Synod now needs to decide how to proceed with the paper, and whether at some stage to move to adopt the document as a position paper. The Study Commission recommends that the discussion process in the congregations still be extended, but that this synod allows some time for discussion and feedback.

Delaying a vote will of course extend the period of uncertainty for the church council as to how to deal with the question of the ministry of gays or lesbians in our church. There is no church law that makes sexual orientation a criterion when deciding on ordination, election or installation of clergy. However, in and amongst our congregations there is an understanding (based on moral grounds and perception) that it is not possible, even though there was never a law against it. This has had a direct effect on who feels called or applies for the ministry in our congregations.

Prospective candidates will need to be thoroughly informed about the unclear situation at present and that it is a very divisive issue in our congregations. If nevertheless some candidates want to apply to posts or to study theology, we suggest that synod mandates the church council to handle this situation with the sensitivity it requires, knowing that this issue is unresolved and likely to cause tension within our church.

Ultimately synod will have to come to a decision. It should be clearly communicated in advance to congregations if a future synod will vote on this issue, so that this does not come without preparation. The study commission however feels that to force a vote at this stage is more likely to set us back than take us forward.

Discussion questions for synod small groups:

- 1) What would be the likely reaction and consequences in my congregation at this stage if our synod votes to open the ministry to gay and lesbian clergy?
- 2) What would be the advantages / disadvantages of delaying the vote for another one/ two sessions of synod?
- 3) What would be the reactions, consequences if this issue was delayed indefinitely?
- 4) What is the way forward you as a synod representative would suggest to the church?