

Covering Letter to the document
Discussion Document on Homosexuality - with particular emphasis on the question of
employment of clergy

Compiled by the Theological Study Commission of ELCSA (N-T)
expanded to include UELCSA

October 2015

To all ELCSA (N-T) Synod delegates

The 2013 Synod requested the Theological Study Commission to continue the task given in 2011 to investigate the issue of Homosexuality particularly as it relates to the ordained clergy. This was necessitated by ambiguities in the former discussion document of ELCSA (N-T). It has taken the Theological Study Commission 4 years to complete a thorough process of study and discussion and serious soul-searching. We know the issue is controversial and that many people will disagree with the findings and recommendations made. There have been voices warning about the divisive potential of introducing this document to synod. However we believe that as the task has come from synod, only the synod delegates can decide on the process to go forward. We give this document to synod delegates, trusting that they will deal with it responsibly. At the moment these are recommendations based on the theological findings of the Study Commission. They are not the recommendations of the Pastors' Convention, or of the Church Council, but of a working group within the church which was given this task and the paper should be treated as such.

We suggest that there be discussion mainly on the process at this synod, and that congregations are then given time to reflect on the issue. The study commission has taken a long time to discuss the issue. Pastors and congregations also need time and thorough discussions and the awareness that there is an openness to deal with different opinions within our church. The theme of this synod is Diversity in Unity. Within our church there are heterosexual and homosexual people, and there are people with a wide diversity of opinion about this issue. We want to acknowledge this diversity, knowing that it brings potential for conflict, but knowing we can also help each other to grow through our differences and our willingness to struggle together. We have realised in the course of the study process that what causes deep conflict in our church is our way of understanding scripture, which is not understood or followed by many of our members. This paper is based on the earlier paper of ELCSA (N-T), on "Understanding Scripture". We realise that work on this needs to be ongoing.

We as Study Commission believe we have executed the task entrusted to us to the best of our ability, and we also believe, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We know that the Paper can be critiqued and already has been critiqued. The Church Council and pastors' conventions had received an earlier draft. Some of the comments from there have already been included.

We pray that this paper will open the discussion within our church that we may all deepen our understanding of what is a burning issue amongst our members and within society as a whole. Whether you can go along with the recommendations or believe the church needs to go a completely different way, we pray that we will stay in dialogue and on a common way in our church.

Signed

Rev. Dr. Gertrud Tonsing