

This document was **created by the Reverend James Mauney, bishop of the VA synod**, sent to VA clergy on 8/28/09. He requests that this document be shared with the people of the congregations so they can know where he stands on issues discussed and voted on at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2009

Anyone wishing to have the full 10 page document can request it from Pastor Sandy Wisco. The page number references in this selection are from the document stored on my computer so for proper page references, this document is the one to request. I added a header and footer to the original document to clearly identify its source and to number the pages.

These notes have been excerpted for Oct NL (it arrived too late for Sept issue). His full report is available at your request. Your name and an email or snail mail address is all I need.

Bishop Mauney writes:

I greet you in the Name that is above every Name, our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, who fills the height, depth, length, and breadth of all things, including your lives, this synod, and His whole Church. May we be made strong in the strength that comes from his glorious power, while being prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light as we care for the mission of this church across this nation and around the world.

In the midst of our full communion with the United Methodist Church, I offer John Wesley's Rule,
"Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can."

Galatians 6: "So whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for the family of Christ."

May we keep our focus on Christ even in the midst of our discussions.

As your bishop, I would like to define for you where I personally am as we continue together to converse with one another who are in a variety of understandings.

Having shared where I am, it allows me, then, to be ever more attentive to your sharing with me and my listening with you.

The approved social statement on Human Sexuality provides a way of understanding relationships through the lens of 'trust.' I am grateful in all the ways it speaks to being chaste before marriage, to all the ways it speaks for the care and welfare of children and families, to the ways it challenges our culture and society in the ways that we demean and exploit others in matters of sex.

Where I would ask for greater clarity was in the sections on marriage and family. I believe the Task Force was seeking to speak to the centeredness of marriage and family throughout the Church's centuries, but it lacked the bold word for it.

The statement says, "Social trust undergirds healthy societies." I believe marriage between husband and wife who raise children in a healthy way is what undergirds healthy

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societies, one generation upon another. This is the normative tradition that has come to us through the centuries and continues to be the gold standard for societal stability.

The scriptures' and Martin Luther norm marriage and raising children in the faith as what produces strong families, one generation built upon another. This family structure undergirds healthy societies. A part of our catechism is our teaching to youth and young adults this life long commitment blessed by God where the very mystery of the otherness of God is found in the other. The additional blessing that is possible within marriage is then to bear children and to raise them in the faith and love of God [4th Commandment, Large Catechism]. It is to be taught, then, to children and grandchildren and greatgrandchildren. This care of parents to pass on the faith and its life is what St. Paul speaks to II Timothy 1:13-14: "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us." Remaining chaste until one finds such a partner for a life long marriage that may lead to children and raising a new generation in the faith is at the center and normative for our understanding of this tradition handed down to us.

I heard the commissioner of the dept of social services of our commonwealth say that after 30 years of working in social services he had come to the conclusion that a family with both father and mother is the very spine of our society today.

I would speak for this kind of clarity in the social statement's sections on marriage and family and children, and this is what I believe is what should be lifted up as the normative tradition among us.

I would like us to speak forthrightly about this marriage between man and woman and this gift of both mother and father as bishops within the home that are the foundation of our church and society.

This is the strong, mighty tree that sustains healthy generations and family trees.

Then as we acknowledge that all of us struggle not as we ought but as we are able, we might speak to how we then provide welcome and shelter in the branches of this foundation for all of us who struggle within our relationships.

At the end of my words, I have added my pertinent words on my views about homosexuality and life within the church, written before the synod assembly. It was sent to all the rostered leaders, but some did not share it with the membership. I think it is important to read what I have written so that you know where I am coming from as we enter into the days ahead.

I do give great thanks to God for you and your love in the Lord and serving in His Name!!

[From Bishop Mauney's pages of text, I select a few that I believe will be helpful]

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- ⇒ Pg. 3 item #3 The Virginia Synod has come out of ULCA and LCA tradition where the synod has seen itself as a vibrant partner within the whole church. The Virginia Synod has looked to the decisions of its churchwide assemblies as giving wisdom through social statements, directions, and policies for the whole church. In these past eighteen years of these discussions, the Virginia Synod was not the testing ground for the blessing of same sex unions or the ordination of rostered leaders in same sex unions because of the churchmanship of our rostered leaders who looked to the churchwide assembly to give direction, as it should. I want to express my deep appreciation to all of those rostered leaders and congregations that remained strongly a part of the synod even while being greatly disturbed at the church's non-movement in these matters. They now look to their partners within the synod as these decisions by the churchwide assembly come into effect to remain steadfastly among us.
- ⇒ Pg.3 item #4 This past June, our Virginia Synod Assembly took a number of sense motions on these issues that the churchwide assembly approved. Our votes as a synod were in the ranges of from 220-170 to 210 to 180 on these matters. Individuals within congregations that see their congregations as 100% for or against, may discover their congregations to be closer to 55%/45%.
- ⇒ Pg. 4-5 item #6 and its subparts highlight the text of the newly approved documents. (*there is no item #6 subpart 3*)

[He concludes that section with]:

Here are the words I shared in late May that still reflect my thinking:

"I recognize that many who are gay are not so by simply choice. We do not fully understand why we are sexually oriented the way we are, whether genetic, environmental, sociological, relational, but it seems to begin very early for just about all of us. I continue in conversation with sociologists, doctors, theologians, reading and listening, but I do not yet hear a clear foundational grounding that is Copernican in scientific proof or sociologically certain. I have not, like Peter in Acts, seen the holy vision as from only God regarding a new way of seeing. But I am becoming far more aware of the vulnerability of our gay members within our institutional church and our national culture, and I am hearing from more families who now wrestle with this within their homes.

But like all of us, I remain seeking to guard the good treasure entrusted to me.

Now it feels to me that many of us are growing in our heart for those among us who are gay, even as we remain steadfast in our understanding of scriptures and tradition. Remaining connected with those who are gay and remaining connected with the tradition and whole Church is what a colleague bishop of mine describes as the tender crossing of our heart and mind in the midst of our rescued soul. I am compelled baptismally to be grounded and rooted in the love of Christ learned through scripture, tradition, in relationship with the whole Church through the generations and around the world. I am compelled baptismally to be grounded and rooted in the love of Christ to have regard for all my baptized sisters and brothers within this Church including those who are gay.

I begin with what norms me in this matter and then move to my pastoral concern and struggle for those within our own church who are baptized and very active in the church.

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Pg.6

Marriage and Family are normed by scripture and our Lutheran Confessions:

1 The Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions norm male/female Marriage as the intention of God from Genesis to Revelation, from Small Catechism to Large Catechism. Marriage and family is normed from such a relationship. This is our grounding, our starting point, our foundation of what we believe God intends. This is the foundational strength to our generations within the life of the church and society.

[And 9 other statements on the topic follow]

Pg. 7

AND AMONG US, WITHIN OUR CONGREGATIONS AND FAMILIES

1 I recognize that we have gay sisters and brothers that we love within the church, baptized, who are in Christ, who have the Holy Spirit so within them that they cry 'Abba Father', 'Come Lord Jesus', who believe that Christ is true to His baptismal promise that they belong to Him and that Christ does not lie.

[And 7 statements on the topic follow]

Pg.7

Pastorally, I could in instances, use the Hebrew word for Sin as 'Missing the Mark'

While many speak to sin as a wrong deed and repentance as the simple abandoning of wrong, **Luther spoke to sin as a condition, a power from which he sought to be rescued. Our desire to live lives of purity and freedom from wrongdoing may be far more a reality of recognizing our being in a circumstance of sin from which we cannot entirely escape until death, but yet our ongoing desire is to live as faithfully as we can ever asking for forgiveness in this life of our bondage to sin.**

[And 12 statements on the topic follow]

Pg.9-10

Now it seems to me that:

1 **The love of Christ did not and does not bless our circumstances; the love of Christ recognizes the reality of our circumstances and came to rescue us from real powers of sin, evil, and death from which we cannot escape on our own, by our choice.** The love of Christ acts on our behalf to make us His own. Romans 5 speaks to while we were sinful, weak, enemies, he proved his love in acting on our behalf.

[And 7 more statements on the topic follow, including the last one]

8 What may be far more threatening to the strength of the tree is a divorce rate of 50% of marriages within the church. This is the very time we should consider how ineffective our ministry of marriage has been in a church that experiences a 50% divorce rate, and work hard on our recovery of our theology of marriage and family with a renewal of ministry in this area.

In my teaching of confirmation, I would not change in my teaching of the commandments. But, if asked, I would speak to what has been and is the norm of this church, marriage. I would speak to the orders of creation. Then I would speak to how we as the church recognize special circumstances beyond the norm such as divorce and same sex relationships that call for pastoral care and individual counseling that can lead to a pastoral care response that can also call upon the congregation to support. I would speak to those who find themselves beyond the vows of marriage seeking to live now as faithfully as they can with the congregation around them."