

**Frequently Asked Questions about the terms
“Structured Flexibility” and “Public Accountability”
As used in the Recommendation on Ministry Policies that will be considered by the
Churchwide Assembly 2009**

What does the term “structured flexibility” mean?

“Structured flexibility in decision making” describes the way call and candidacy decisions are currently made in the ELCA—there are churchwide policies that are applied in individual cases by those authorized to do so. Depending on the mission and ministry needs in particular situations, the ways in which the policies are applied are already somewhat different. If the changes in these resolutions were adopted, the same approach would be used in considering the approval or call of people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

If adopted, what would be the impact of the 4th resolution?

The impact would be that churchwide policy would allow persons and groups who currently have decision-making responsibility to bring flexibility to their consideration of decisions regarding people in same-gender relationships. Current churchwide policy includes a uniform prohibition that prevents anyone from approving, ordaining, or calling a pastor in a same-gender relationship. The resolution calls for devising ways to protect the bound conscience so that, within their currently defined arenas of responsibility, individuals are not forced to act contrary to their faith convictions.

Who are the persons and bodies that would make decisions?

As at present, the following have decision making authority:

- Congregations determine who shall be called as their rostered leaders;
- Synod and churchwide assemblies and councils have authority to extend calls in constitutionally specified instances;
- Synodical candidacy committees determine who shall be entranced, endorsed and approved for call;
- Bishops have oversight responsibilities including attesting of calls, presiding at ordinations, consecrations and commissionings, considering requests for reinstatement, and guiding the discipline process.

Is structured flexibility another name for “local option” or does this give a body such as a synod a right to establish different policies for itself regarding ministry policy?

No. The recommendation is designed so the ELCA would continue to operate under consistent churchwide policy. The policy would likely result in some diverse practice, based on conscience. It would not allow a synod or calling organization like a congregation to write policies for itself that differs from ELCA policies. This means that a person who meets the ELCA’s standards would be able to serve when and where approval and call are properly issued. Those with responsibility for decision-making would, as now, seek to discern whether the mission of this church would be served best by approving or calling that particular candidate or rostered leader.

But what happens, for instance, if someone in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship seeking to be admitted to the roster has a candidacy committee whose majority is opposed for reasons of conscience?

Policies will need to be developed to address this and other specific complex situations. The resolution charges the Vocation and Education program unit, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, to make policy and procedure recommendations to the Church Council.

What is “public accountability”?

Public accountability means that one’s conduct can be evaluated according to recognized standards. The point in the document is that means would need to be developed or recognized by which synods and congregations who choose to do so could hold rostered or roster-seeking people accountable in their same gender relationships.

Why is “public accountability” important?

Public accountability for conduct is important because the office of ministry is a public office on behalf of the Word of God. For that reason, the task force believed that there must be means for holding people in same-gender relationships accountable. Using the language of the proposed social statement, the task force asserts that such relationships must be “lifelong and monogamous.” Those with responsibility in candidacy and call processes would take public accountability into consideration as they made their decisions.

How would such accountability be indicated for those seeking to be rostered or already serving on the ELCA roster?

At present, ELCA candidacy and mobility forms ask all candidates to indicate whether they are single or married. If this recommendation were adopted, the Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, and the program unit for Vocation and Education would work on ways of indicating public accountability in relationships for same-gender oriented people.

If this resolution were passed, would policy change immediately?

Though assembly action would be decisive, there would be no immediate change in practice because the resolution calls for the preparation of various policies and guidelines and for specific action by the ELCA Church Council. Even the removal of the general prohibition requires council action. Since the next meeting of the Church Council is in November 2009, that is the earliest date by which the resolution could be implemented.