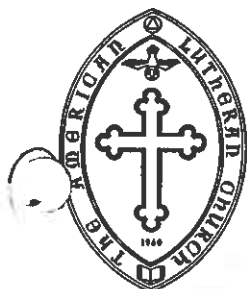


# WOMEN AND MEN

## IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

### —Toward Wholeness in the Christian Community



*(A statement of the Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 5, 1972, by action GC72.5.22.)*

*(Paragraphs 1 through 6 were adopted as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)*

*(Paragraphs 7 through 10 were adopted as guidelines to the policy and practice of The American Lutheran Church.)*

1. The American Lutheran Church is pleased to see the strides being made in church and society to recognize the rights of women. Such strides are matters of simple justice and equity.

2. God created all human beings in His image. Some He created female, some male. Though each person bears some bodily traits of the other sex, each person is known as female or male. Through training and in living together we encounter the customs, roles, and rules of the communities in which we live, and we learn what is expected of female and male. Such qualities as gentleness, compassion, helpfulness, and artistic appreciation usually are characterized as feminine. Such qualities as assertiveness, vigor, initiative, and strength usually are regarded as masculine. Yet, they are human qualities found in both females and males, each found in varying degrees in each person. The deeper meaning of our God-given sexuality, which both separates us and attracts us, remains a profound mystery. We do not try to fathom this mystery. Rather, we accept and celebrate the mystery of our femaleness and maleness as one of God's gifts.

3. Women and men unnecessarily see themselves as antagonists. Insecurity, lack of identity, incompleteness, denial of rights, and restricted freedoms of choice root in our human estrangement from God and from one another. Competition, conflict, antagonism, fear, abuse of power and physical strength, and reliance on wiles, seductiveness, and manipulation fracture the wholeness of our humanity. Women and men have differing ideas, pictures, and expectations, each of the other sex. Their communication is incomplete. These conditions are a consequence of our human alienation from God.

4. In both church and society customs, traditions, and rules have defined what is right and proper for women to do and for men to do. Roles and activities defined for women and for men are interrelated. Neither can be understood apart from the other. Under the impact of massive social change the traditional role definitions are breaking down. No longer need women so predominantly find their identity through their roles in the family, men through their roles in the job. Both women and men now are seeking for identity, for recognition, and for

integrity in new roles, new spheres, new relationships. Both women and men struggle with myths, stereotypes, customs, and practices which raise artificial barriers against their finding their identity and fulfilling their selfhood.

5. The changing roles of women and men have particular impact on the family. God through Creation indeed assigns the child-bearing role to the woman. The important tasks associated with child nurture, providing the physical and emotional necessities, and fostering the development of the child into a mature adult however, require the efforts of men as well as of women. Family living should be an example of love, respect, commitment, sharing, caring, choices, and serving in accord with abilities, functions, and the freedom of each human being. Persons need to see that the demands of marriage and family living depend not on hierarchy, status, and power or weakness of male and female but on the maturity, mutuality, and wholeness of persons participating responsibly in the dynamics of interpersonal living.

6. Every social institution is affected by the growing realization that women have rights, abilities, and responsibilities for participating in the whole of life. Opportunities once limited to men are opening to women. Opportunities once regarded as "women's work" are opening to men. Standards for hours and conditions of work, for pay, for promotions and advancement, for valuing services to the community, and for legal rights, residence, and domicile, for example, will be affected. Similarly, the worlds of business and finance, of commerce and industry, of education, medicine, politics, and the mass media, must incorporate the realization that women as well as men make up the wholeness of our human community.

7. As Christians we need to examine critically the competing claims as to rightful roles and responsibilities of men and women in church and society. We need to exercise judgment as to what is beneficial and what is detrimental to persons, to families, and to the ability of social structures to serve human needs. We challenge the dominance of market-value indicators as measures of personal worth. We insist that physical beauty, power, wealth, prestige, or success bear no necessary relationship to a person's quality of life or ability to contribute to the common good. We point out that a man or a woman is a person, not defined either by marriage or by parenthood. In discussions of men/women roles and relationships we Christians bring to the fore also such points as the following:

- (a) sexuality is a part of life but not the whole of life;
- (b) men and women are persons, not things;
- (c) men and women are equal as persons, complementary in their sexuality, mutually related in their wholeness;
- (d) under God and in relation to other persons each human being possesses unique worth and integrity;
- (e) the right to make decisions affecting one's life is of the essence of personhood;
- (f) men and women have the freedom to make choices related to work, community service, education, marriage, parenthood, and the like;
- (g) freedom is a release from bondage to sin and self and a release for service to others as to Christ;
- (h) responsible self-fulfillment is rewarding to the person and beneficial to church and society;

(i) neither pride nor the quest for self-satisfaction on the part of either men or women should cause neglect of children, overlook their welfare, or deny them the care and nurture they need;

(j) to do the will of God on earth as the Spirit gives understanding, the needs of others require, and resources permit is part of every person's calling.

8. The American Lutheran Church confesses its failure to teach the whole of God's counsel concerning relationships between men and women. It has tended to accept the ways of society as the way of God. Under the pressures of the times, however, it has re-examined, in the light of the Scriptures, its teachings and practices concerning men and women. The General President put two questions to the theological faculties: (a) "Do you find that the Scriptures forbid the ordination of women or service of women in the ministry of Word and Sacrament?" and (b) "Do you find in the Scriptures, orders of creation which enunciate a principle of women being subordinate to men which then pertains directly to the role women should serve in the ministry?" The faculties of each of the three seminaries, meeting independently, concluded unanimously that the Scriptural answer to each question is NO. This firm response, with accompanying documentation, frees The American Lutheran Church to do that which justice and equity require in its teachings and practices concerning femaleness and maleness in the wholeness of the Christian community.

9. In freedom from traditional legalism and in freedom for mission and ministry to men and women, the Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church offers the following guidelines for action:

(a) nominating committees for national, district, conference, institutional, and congregational officers, staffs, boards, and committees in their search for candidates who are capable, committed, motivated, and willing and able to serve if chosen, should take active steps to bring women significantly into leadership roles in the church;

(b) constitutions of The American Lutheran Church, its districts, conferences, congregations, institutions, and agencies should be reviewed to eliminate any provisions or language which deny women their full participating membership in the life of the church;

(c) the new worship forms and the official statements, messages, and resolutions of The American Lutheran Church should be expressed in generic terms which clearly connote humanity rather than gender;

(d) editors of church publications should take care not to perpetuate stereotypes which artificially limit the choices, roles, and opportunities open to men and women;

(e) channels should be opened whereby more women can be informed of, motivated, and welcomed to serve in the professional ministry of The ALC;

(f) theological faculties should take active steps toward encouraging women to pursue theological education, calling women to the faculties of the theological seminaries, creating an accepting climate for women in theological education, and enabling men and women to better understand their own sexuality and thus their ministry to and with each other;

(g) congregations should be helped to show in attitudes and actions their acceptance of women in the ministry of Word and sacrament;

(h) Laity Sunday should include the entire laity, leading to regular year-

around involvement of lay men and women in ministering roles whenever the congregation gathers for study, worship, and the sacraments;

(i) congregations should provide opportunities for general meetings and for home worship, study, and discussion in small groups wherein men and women may grow in communication and understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding human roles and potential;

(j) congregations should consider, either alone or in partnership, the possibilities of establishing and operating a nursery school or a day care center to function as an aid to families in meeting their responsibilities for child rearing and nurture;

(k) programs for continuing education should assist pastors and leaders of the congregations toward understanding and accepting their own sexuality, so that the information and attitudes they communicate may foster wholeness in the Christian community;

(l) new ministries should be developed by and for women in relation to the rising consciousness of women's identity in church and society;

(m) educational aids should be developed and utilized so as to motivate members of this church to accept their responsibilities for bringing about the recognition and acceptance of the rights, abilities, and contributions of women to wholeness in the human community;

(n) concerted efforts should be made to offset and protest the distorted sexuality and suffocating sexual stereotypes portrayed in much of the mass media;

(o) the church at all its levels of organization and in all its units should strive for equal employment opportunities and for personnel practices which assure all of its employees every opportunity for service, advancement, and reward in accord with their demonstrated competence;

(p) the Office of Research and Analysis (the presumed successor to the Commission on Church and Society) should be charged with reviewing progress toward implementation of these goals and to report any findings and recommendations to the Church Council and General Convention.

10. Action along these guidelines will testify to the church's concern for the personhood of each man and each woman in its membership. Such action will bear witness to its understanding of the female and male elements in the wholeness of the Christian community. The church, above all institutions, is free in the Spirit of the Living Christ. It is free to listen, to ask, to search, to probe for the truth. It is free to adapt and to adopt new forms and patterns for faithfulness in mission and ministry. It moves as it believes the Gospel requires it to move—toward the wholeness of men and women in church and society.

The printing and distribution of this statement by the:

Office of Church in Society  
The American Lutheran Church  
422 South Fifth Street  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415

has been authorized by the General Secretary of The American Lutheran Church.

Additional copies are available from  
Augsburg Publishing House  
4¢ per copy; 44¢ per doz.; \$3.60 per 100

Printed in U.S.A.

6-81-10M

