

Bill

I am writing this letter in response to the ELCA Proposed Social Statement on Genetics which was released on Friday, February, 25th.

I first became invested in this issue last summer when this social statement was still in draft form. At the time, I was working as an agronomist and genetic technologies were a part of my recommendations for management of crops. I also farm with my husband near Hillsboro, ND, and we raise 100% GMO crops on our farm. Currently, I am a student at NDSU pursuing a Master of Science in Soil Science.

My response to the draft was to read it and create a letter of response to the ELCA Task Force on Genetics. My response letter outlined 7 specific items that I appreciated, and it also outlined 2 items that I thought the ELCA needed to work on. I concluded my letter by telling the ELCA that they need to work on the way that social statements are drafted because the current process causes too much stress at the congregational level. I read this letter, all 3 pages of it, at a meeting sanctioned by the Eastern North Dakota Synod for the sole purpose of discussing the draft social statement at the round level of the church. This meeting was held in Adams, ND in August of 2010. Bishop Bill Rindy, Rev. Kari Bahe, Associate with the Bishop, and Per Anderson Co-Chair of the Task Force on Genetics were in attendance. At that meeting, my comments were taken seriously.

Truthfully, I had no idea how seriously my comments had been taken until I read the Proposal Social Statement this past weekend. This is a well written document that is fair to all aspects of agriculture. I believe this document to an excellent document to use as a starting point for a bridge between urban and rural for facilitation of how genetic technology fits into agriculture today. If you are involved in agriculture and the ELCA church and have concerns with this statement, I encourage you to read the statement for yourself and create your own opinion.

One of the most powerful meanings of the statement for me as a farmer is the concept of humans as stewards. We are supposed to be stewards of the creation, which to a farmer, means feeding a hungry world while preserving the land and environment for the future. The farmers I know are already actively doing this. We are supplying food as a basic, human right. We produce the safest, most abundant, and cheapest food in the world, to feed a hungry a world. We also wish the future generations of farmers on our lands to have better opportunities. Thus, we take care of our land and our environment for generations to come. Genetic technology is certainly a component of making these things happen and this social statement proposal reflects that accurately.

There are other components of this proposal that, as a farmer, I also appreciated. I appreciate the ELCA's position on regulation of genetic technology. It calls for regulation, but regulation must also be justified by specific concerns. This statement also shows value to the balance public, private, and government sectors and their various involvements with genetic technology. Overall, this proposal encourages us to use genetic technology as a gift from God in a responsible way for the betterment of all creation.

It's important to note that this was a statement drafted to address other genetic technology issues beyond involvement in agriculture. The ELCA has taken a stance

against the use of human cloning. The ELCA also has taken a stance against the use of genetic profiling, the practice of eugenics, and beliefs in genetic determination. I rejoice in the ELCA's position on these topics as well.

I still request the ELCA to analyze the way it is creating its social statements. I understand the point of a social statement is to learn about The Living Word in our daily and current lives. As a Christian, this is good and necessary. However, I think we need to make sure that this is done in a manner that does not hinder the declaration of the gospel or the ability of our members to "love our neighbors as ourselves." Throughout the consideration of the last few social statements this has definitely been a challenge. If we cannot achieve the objective of declaring the gospel and "loving our neighbor as ourselves" as our primary mission, it will be easy for any part of our mission to be questioned and potentially misguided.

That being said, the ELCA Task Force on Genetics listened to my comments. Because of the content of the current proposal, I'm also assuming they listened to the comments of others within the agricultural community. The truth is, when an informed comment based in fact was stated, it was heard and regarded justly.

I can attest that my personal relationship with Christ has been strengthened because of this experience. This is because this experience has challenged me to analyze The Living Word in my daily life and my daily calling. The Word was revealed to me through study of the scripture, the new relationships built with the many people who have a stake in this social statement, and most importantly, through my personal prayer with Christ himself. To the ELCA Church, to the Task Force on Genetics, and to the Bishop Bill Rindy and his staff.... My sincere thanks!

Sincerely,

Sarah E. H. Lovas

1Corinthians 3:6-7- "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow."