

# Rural church leaves ELCA over gay clergy, genetics proposal

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) A rural North Dakota church has voted to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, not only to protest its recent policies to allow gay clergy but also its proposed statement on genetically modified foods.

Members of the Anselm Trinity Lutheran Church near Sheldon, N.D., interpreted the ELCA's draft statement as saying farmers who use genetically modified seeds are "pretty much sinners," said church council president Jill Bunn.

The church is located in the Red River Valley, where farmers often use enhanced seeds to help plants resist weed killers.

The 25-4 vote, taken Nov. 7, comes at a time when other churches are leaving the ELCA after it decided last year to permit noncelibate gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex unions.

Bunn said news of the ELCA genetics proposal in a farming publication gave the congregation another reason to depart. "That just added to the gay-lesbian proposal that they passed already," she said.

Bishop Bill Rindy of the ELCA's Eastern North Dakota Synod said he was unaware of any concern the congregation might have had about the

proposed genetic statement when it voted to leave the ELCA.

The 63-page draft statement is being developed for consideration at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly next August, but Rindy said it will likely be revised before then.

"If anyone reads the statement for themselves they'll see that it does not condemn genetically engineered seeds and it doesn't make any recommendation on farm management practices," said Roger Willer, the ELCA staff person working with the task force developing the statement.

The North Dakota church has joined the more conservative Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, which attributes most of its growth to departing ELCA churches.