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Seventeen scholars from 12 campuses have released a strong statement against a proposal that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officially maintain its stance against same-sex ceremonies and gay clergy while tolerating dissent from that policy.

The protesters say that the measure, put forward by a task force in January, threatens the church's unity and its "historical, biblical and confessional teachings and practice."

A churchwide assembly of the 5-million-member ELCA will take up the proposal in August.

The scholars' group complains that though the task force said it recommends "no change in policy," it in fact "advocates a fundamental shift in policy" when it asks the church to refrain from disciplining clergy involved in same-sex relationships.

That approach, they say, would "fatally extend the boundaries of diversity in matters of doctrinal and ethical substance" and harm relations with other Christian bodies. The group also contends that the task force's claimed support from Martin Luther and the Bible misrepresents both.