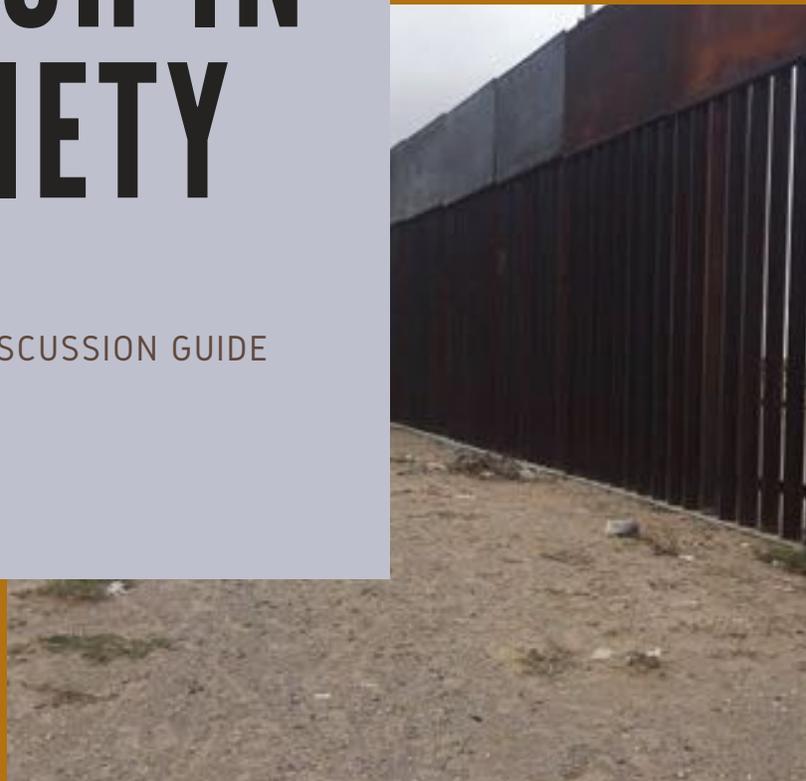
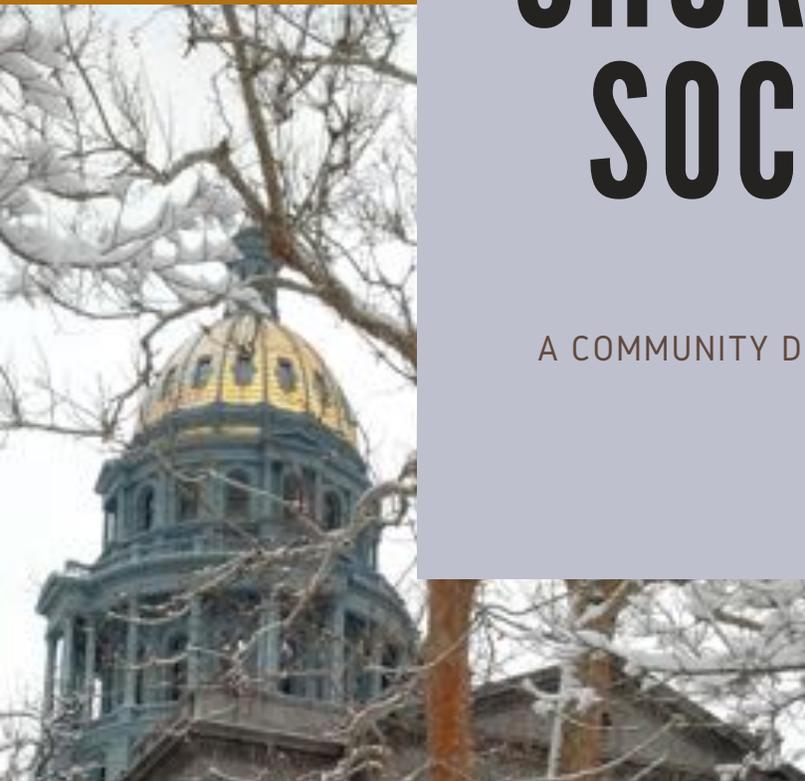




LIVING FAITH: CHURCH IN SOCIETY

A COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE



*A Reconciling in Christ Synod
An AMMPARO Welcoming Synod*



Rocky Mountain Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Christians fulfill their vocations in many ways and have many gifts. They will often disagree passionately on social questions. As a way of wrestling with social questions, the statement proposes the ELCA act as a “community of moral deliberation” (p. 5). Such a community looks together to Scripture as the normative source of faith and life and to the best knowledge available in the secular realm as it deliberates toward good actions and policies. Deliberation occurs in the context of those who disagree, and the voices of those who have an interest at stake or will suffer consequences are an integral part of that deliberation. It is in a public process guided by the Holy Spirit that Christians come to discern what action they should take when dealing with complicated issues

-ELCA Social Statement: Church in Society (1991)

Living Faith: Church in Society

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Peter Severson, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado
Deacon Erin Power, Assistant to the Bishop

#HELPASOSTRONG

Discussion Guide

Leading the Conversation

Each session includes the same components: prayer, scripture, brief reflection, and discussion questions. We encourage you to review the guidelines for discussion (either the included or other norms established by your community) at the beginning of each session. Additional guidelines or group norms may be helpful if leading an online discussion.

Pre-gathering: Send the brief reflection and link to the social statement to each participant to read prior to gathering.

Opening: Begin by reviewing any discussion guidelines or norms for facilitating conversation.

Pray: Offer an opening prayer, or invite another participant to pray.

Read: Invite someone to read the selected scripture verse

Summarize: Invite one participant to share some of what stuck out to them, questions that emerged, and key points from the statement.

Discuss: Open the dialogue utilizing one or more of the discussion question

Closing Prayer: End your time together with the included or another prayer.



Discussion Guide Cont'd

Conversation Covenant

From "Conversation Toward a Social Statement: Faith, Women, & Sexism"

- **Listen respectfully and carefully to others.** This is your best way to begin to understand them and to keep the “public space” of this conversation safe for candid conversation. Listening helps bring out differences and helps to probe for shared values and positions.
 - **Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings.** Personal thoughts, feelings, values and experiences are as legitimate a part of the conversation as factual information.
 - **Speak for yourself, only; use “I-statements” rather than “you-statements.”** Likewise, it is not fair to expect other conversation partners to represent a whole group. Remember that they are only speaking for themselves.
 - **Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a particular perspective in your common discernment.** Everyone should be encouraged to speak and to listen.
 - **Help keep the discussion focused by sticking to the subject at hand.**
 - **Maintain confidentiality about matters people share with the group when it is asked or obviously appropriate.** Remember: If in doubt, do not share elsewhere. This helps to build and maintain trust.
 - **Keep an open mind and heart.** Try to understand others as much as possible from their point of view as they express it. Even those who disagree with you strongly may have new insights to ponder.
 - **Exercise care for group members, with a special concern for those who become upset over what is said during the conversation.**
-

Session 1: Church in Society

Introduction

[Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective](#) articulates the teaching of the ELCA on the church's relation to society and its public presence and responsibilities. The statement begins with the claim that the witness of the church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and for the gospel. It sets forth the basic affirmations that structure how faith is active in a love that calls for justice in relationships and structures of society. The statement also identifies as basic commitments the church's institutional witness in society, the baptismal vocation of individual Christians, and the church as a community of moral deliberation. This document was the first social statement, adopted by the ELCA in 1991. [credit: elca.org]

Scripture

Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."



Session 1: Church in Society

As a Public Church

Bishop Jim Gonia, Rocky Mountain Synod ELCA

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, our practice of serving our neighbor and our world flows directly from our experience of God's grace in the sacraments. It is part of our ELCA "D.N.A.," a grateful response to God's work in our lives. For us, it is not something we do to "win" God's favor and love – after all, you cannot earn something that is already freely given! Instead, service is an answer to the question, "Now what?"

A major aspect of this service in the world is our work as a public church, where we are called into the arena of social and political questions about how we govern our common life. As a church, we do not hesitate to enter into the public sphere, to speak to those in power and to advocate with and on behalf of those dealing with poverty, alienation, and injustice. This is how we respond to God's free gift of grace and love for us.

Martin Luther said, "Freed by God's grace, we turn to the neighbor in love." Our neighbor is always our answer to "Now what?" We will always wrestle with the specific answers to this question as it is lived out in the policies and structures that govern our common life. But God does not leave us alone in this, and we will always rest on the living word of the Gospel amid even our most difficult deliberations. I encourage you to use this Living Faith series to explore how you and your community might open up holy space for this kind of deliberation together, and to be faithfully formed and transformed in the process.



Session 1: Church in Society

Addressing Social Issues as People of Faith

Peter Severson, Director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado

When I think of what it means to live out my Christian faith on a daily basis, I often remember the words of the poet, Christian Wiman:

“Silence is the language of faith. Action – be it church or charity, politics or poetry, is the translation... Without these constant translations into action, that original, sustaining silence begins to be less powerful, and then less accessible, and then finally impossible.”

We decided to call this curriculum series Living Faith because “living” isn’t just an adjective describing our faith. Rather, it’s an active verb which describes what we do every day to translate our faith in Jesus Christ into the world.

In the course of that translation, we encounter the vicissitudes of the world: the concerns, joys, uncertainties and problems that shape our lives as individuals, members of households and families, and members of wider communities. As Christians and Lutherans, our understanding of how to address all of those issues faithfully is rooted in a process of shared moral deliberation about our commitments to love and serve our neighbor.

We are gifted with both a rich legacy and an active, engaged tradition of this deliberation in the ELCA. We have a body of social teaching, rooted in Social Statements and other resources, that helps guide our understanding of a wide range of major social issues. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to become equipped for our calling in the world, and to nurture others in the same. Faith formation is therefore a foundational and lifelong endeavor when it comes to being prepared to engage in moral deliberation together.



Session 1: Church in Society

Addressing Social Issues as People of Faith, cont'd.

We are also called to ongoing learning and conversation, free from the pressure of having to come to a complete consensus or “final answer.” This is a major hope we hold for your use of the Living Faith curriculum: that it be a tool for igniting this conversation and deepening the learning and understanding that is presently taking place in your community.

It is no secret that we live in volatile times that often seem to be hostile to respectful, engaged conversation about complex topics. This is precisely why the church – you, the people, who are the church – are so needed in this weary world. What a gift we have to share: the Good News of the Gospel and its transforming power extends into every sphere of our lives, even those that seem impenetrably fraught with tension and misunderstanding. The church is one of the few spaces left where we might converse, debate, and even disagree deeply on major issues, but nonetheless remain in relationship with one another in our common baptismal identity. Jesus names and claims us, and with the freedom given to us by his saving work on the cross, we are able to turn to our neighbor in love and a spirit of service as we walk the road together.

Thanks be to God!



Session 1: Church in Society

Discussion Questions

- ELCA social statements sometimes arouse uneasiness or hostility in those who believe that the church is offering counsel beyond its proper domain, or blurring a perceived red line between “religion and politics”. How do you perceive the advocacy that Church in Society calls for fares in this regard?
- What is your understanding of the ELCA’s commitment to advocacy?
- ELCA social statements sometimes arouse uneasiness or hostility in those who believe that the church is offering counsel beyond its proper domain, or blurring a perceived red line between “religion and politics”. How does Church in Society address this concern?

Prayer

O God of love and grace, you have called each of us by name. Thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, who transformed a cross of torture into a tree of life, that we might receive that new life to shine forth that love in our lives. Bless us as we contend with the serious issues that confront our communities, hold us as we step into rich conversations, and lead us from life-giving dialogue into action, and all for your love’s sake. In the name of God, the maker of our days and keeper of our lives, we pray: Amen.



Session 2: Caring for Creation

Introduction

The Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice social statement explains the ELCA's teachings on ecology and the environment, grounded in a biblical vision of God's intention for the healing and wholeness of creation. This statement provides a Christian understanding of the human role to serve in creation, and a hope rooted in God's faithfulness to the creation from which humans emerge and depend upon for sustaining life. It provides a framework for understanding the human role in creation, the problem of sin and the current environmental crisis. Caring for Creation expresses a call to pursue justice for creation through active participation, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability, and states the commitments of the ELCA for pursuing wholeness for creation — commitments expressed through individual and community action, worship, learning, moral deliberation and advocacy. [credit: elca.org]

Scripture

Job 38:25-27

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and make the ground put forth grass?

Luke 5: 36-39



Session 2: Caring for Creation

Environmental Justice

Larry Rasmussen, Santa Fe, NM

This ELCA Social Statement was adapted in 1993. It holds up rather well, especially Section IV, The Call to Justice, with its four norms of participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability.

The world and planet have changed dramatically since 1993, however. Climate system change and the coronavirus pandemic upend the world everywhere. Study of Caring for Creation should ask what these planetary events mean for our lives now and for the lives of future generations of both human and other-than-human life.

The single biggest change in my years of engagement with “eco-issues” is the shift from recycle, re-use, renew to environmental justice. The former used the language of stewardship in which we are the stewards and nature the stewarded. Any deep critique of our institutions, especially our kind of economy, went missing. The focus instead was on personal habits and how changing them would conserve resources, reduce pollution and waste, etc.

Environmental justice, by contrast, connects caring for creation to most everything else. More on that in a moment. First to note is the shift in the leadership of environmentalism. As one way put it, it is no longer elderly white Quakers driving Priuses. As measured by polling, the two groups of Americans who care most about healthy environments are African-Americans and Latinx Americans; and the face of environmentalism now is predominately that of younger women of color.



Session 2: Caring for Creation

Environmental Justice, cont'd.

Centering on environmental justice, as the Pope does in *Laudato Si'* with the norm of "integral ecology" and a deep connection of the "cry of the Earth" and "the cry of the poor," the question put to every community is, What precisely is it you want to sustain? What "normals" do you want to make normative or exemplary?

What kind of health system, economy, governance do you want and wish to strive for? What kind of race relations, policing, education, and experience of the natural world do you want for yourselves and future generations? What faith, spirituality and morality inform your aspirations and commitments?

Environmental justice has moved such questions as these front and center. It makes *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* far more comprehensive, and more probing, than most of us assumed when first we considered it in 1993.

Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice

The Rev. Wes Aardahl

This social statement was the topic of conversation at a recent meeting of the re-formed RMS Caring for Creation committee. Participants agreed that the authors of the document were remarkably far-sighted. Few weaknesses are evident after nearly 27 years of exposure. It's not surprising that an ecological social statement released in 1993 should include topsoil erosion, acid rain, ozone depletion, and loss of species in its list of ills. It is surprising to see global warming attributed to humankind and addressed with such urgency. How sobering to look back at this document and read this warning: 'Action to counter degradation, especially within this decade [ending in 2003!] is essential to the future of our children and our children's children. Time is very short!'



Session 2: Caring for Creation

Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice, cont'd.

Caring for Creation decries 'humanity's separation from God and from the rest of creation'. It extols a sense of 'human kinship with other creatures' and actions that are 'in solidarity with creation.' Caring for Creation is also strikingly anthropocentric. It casts humans as 'creation's caregivers' and 'God's stewards of the earth', and contends that these grand roles are grounded in a singular biblical vision. One might wonder if such elevation of humankind feeds the very separations that are elsewhere lamented. Caring for Creation is more consistent in advocating solidarity among humans, especially between privileged humans and the more vulnerable humans who are disproportionately victimized by environmental degradation. It helpfully calls attention to the importance of pastoral care for the victimized.

The authors of this enduring social statement are to be commended for making bold commitments on the part of the whole ELCA (e.g. environmental tithing and audits, liturgical creativity, mediation, and advocacy), for commending global church collaboration, and for reminding us of both the despair that so commonly afflicts us and the surpassing hope that is our inheritance.

Caring for Creation decries 'humanity's separation from God and from the rest of creation'. It extols a sense of 'human kinship with other creatures' and actions that are 'in solidarity with creation.'



Session 2: Care for Creation

Discussion Questions

- What do the four norms in Section IV, The Call to Justice, mean for a world impacted by climate disruption and a pandemic? What changes follow for your community?
- Some observers claim the “myth of separation” between humanity and the environment is a destructive dualism that views humanity as the active subject and nature/creation as the passive object. Do you think the Social Statement advances this “myth”? Why or why not?
- “Excessive consumption” is labeled destructive. But structural elements of the kind of economy that creates it are not discussed. What are they?
- Caring for Creation advocates strong responsibility on the part of humankind in relation to the rest of creation. Do we have a problem of not shouldering enough responsibility or of assuming too much responsibility for creation to bear? Might it be more appropriate to speak of humans as “creatures”, “residents”, or “tenants” versus “stewards” or “caregivers”?

Prayer

O Lord, you have made us very great. Help us to remember how weak we are, so that we may not deny our kinship with the creatures of the field and our common dependence with them upon summer and winter, day and night. O Lord, you have made us very small, and we bring our years to an end like a tale that is told; help us to remember that beyond our brief day is the eternity of your love.

--excerpt from a prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown, pp. 72-73.



Session 3: Economic Life

Introduction

Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All conveys ELCA teaching that economic activity is a means through which God's will is served for the thriving and well-being of humankind and the care of the earth. It recognizes that even though sin distorts human activity, we are called to practice economic activity justly and with special concern for those who live in poverty.

In this work, the church is guided by the biblically grounded imperative to seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all. This means recognizing the loving scope of God's concern (for all), the means by which life is sustained (livelihood), what is needed (sufficiency) and entails a long-term perspective (sustainability). The statement recognizes that these criteria may be in tension with one another, but together they provide a sound framework for discernment and action. Toward that purpose, the statement discusses commerce, law, vocation, public policy, work, human dignity, agriculture, business and efforts to empower those who live in poverty. This statement was adopted by the 1999 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. [credit: elca.org]

Scripture

Matthew 25:40

Truly I tell you, just as you did it one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.



Session 3: Economic Life

Love God and Love Neighbor

Ruth Hoffman, Santa Fe, NM

This social statement was adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, which was held in Denver, in August of 1999. I had just accepted the position of director of the Rocky Mountain Synod advocacy office in New Mexico and was preparing to begin my ministry by serving as a volunteer during the Churchwide Assembly. As I watched the Assembly debate and then adopt this social statement, I was deeply grateful for the ELCA's discernment and action. I knew that "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" would be central to advocacy ministry in New Mexico which was established by congregational leaders and the Rocky Mountain Synod to intentionally and faithfully respond to God's commandment to "Love God and Love Neighbor." The ministry of advocacy is a means to love God by loving our many neighbors living in poverty and experiencing hunger. New Mexico consistently ranks among the states with the highest rates of poverty and hunger in the nation. This document speaks specifically, prophetically, and urgently about what the church and we, as followers of Jesus, should and can do carry out the moral imperative to address economic life locally, nationally, and globally. From the social statement: "through human decisions and actions, God is at work in economic life. Economic life is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served. When this does not occur, as a church we cannot remain silent because of who and whose we are."

"Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" is a title that does not trip lightly from one's tongue but it does well describe our goals in the work to bring about justice in our economic life. As outlined in the statement:

- the scope of God's concern: **"for all"**
- the means by which life is sustained: **"livelihood"**
- what is needed: **"sufficiency"**
- a long-term perspective **"sustainability"**



Session 3: Economic Life

Discussion Questions

- Why should the ELCA have a social statement on economic life?
- How does our calling from God in our baptism relate to our livelihood, our means of subsistence or how we are supported economically?
- How can what the social statement says about sufficiency impact the life of the church?

Prayer

Creator God, help us to work together for the sake of all – to use the rich variety and experience of our leaders, communities, and organizations to seek economic justice. Remind us daily that we and our institutions are one of the means by which we can serve you and others. Turn our minds, our eyes, and our hearts to the needs of others, to the needs of all of our neighbors and give us the courage to continue to work for a sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all with full and loving hearts. Amen



Session 4: Immigration

Introduction

The social message on "Immigration" presents basic themes for discernment on questions of immigration that our society is facing. It draws from Scripture and the experience of Lutherans in America as an immigrant church in a country of immigrants. The basic themes are grounded in the call to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35) together with the commitment to justice that advocates for fair and generous laws. The message calls for the church to be a welcoming place and points out that immigration, refugee and asylum policies express who we are as a nation and influence the nation's future character. It focuses on questions for discussion and discernment such as facilitating citizenship, newcomers without legal status and the border with Mexico. The message should be read in conjunction with "Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform," a 2009 ELCA social policy resolution on immigration that governs how the ELCA publically addresses contemporary questions about immigration policy reform.

Scripture

Hebrews 13:2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Luke 10: 25-37



Session 4: Immigration

Welcome in the Borderlands

Stephanie González & Kari Lenander, Las Cruces, NM

As an organization that has served the U.S./México border since the ELCA's Immigration Social Message was called to be written in 1997, we read this statement – more than 20 years later – and reflect...

Over the years, hundreds (if not thousands) of high schools, universities, church, and community groups have engaged with and learned from immigrants in the borderlands. We acknowledge that in today's polarized society it seems increasingly important to come together, get to know one another, learn about realities, think critically, and proactively engage with renewed understanding.

In the past few years, the U.S./México borderlands have received hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers journeying to the United States. In response, churches, nonprofits, government organizations, and community members from around the U.S. have come together to support families by providing temporary hospitality, addressing basic needs, and providing travel assistance to sponsors. The genuine welcome comes from a combination of addressing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs; perhaps most importantly, engaging with our neighbors through the recognition of our common humanity.

One Honduran mom, upon departing a Hospitality Center on her journey to her sponsor shared, *"Gracias por todo. Aquí nos sentimos en casa y les agradezco todo el amor que nos dan. Que dios los bendiga."*



Session 4: Immigration

Welcome in the Borderlands, cont'd

We are called as individuals and as a church to both give and receive. In gratitude, we are blessed to offer hospitality and create relationships with our neighbors. In return, we are called to receive the gifts of our neighbors and to engage in the hard work of creating just systemic change – both within and without.

...and always, we're called to welcome the stranger so that – through time and a bit of effort – we may be strangers no longer.

Do This and You Shall Live

Jaen Ugalde

The first time I made the connection between the intersections of faith, spirituality, social justice and my own positionality as an undocumented immigrant brown man born in Mexico and living in the United States, was in the summer 2015 when I participated in a special event held at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The church was hosting a special guest from Centro America who was invited by a local immigrant rights organization called the New Mexico Faith Coalition for Immigrant Justice. The sole purpose of this engagement was to share a meal together, laugh, dance, cry and heal. As I sat in a circle with other participants in the event, I began to feel like I was sitting around a fire listening to the stories of my sister in Christ along with my aunts and uncles from the church. While listening to the experiences being shared by my sister in Christ, tears began to flow from my eyes due to the compelling and resilient stories she was sharing.



Session 4: Immigration

Do This and You Shall Live, cont'd

The stories shared by my sister in Christ touched my heart and soul because, my mother, my father and I also migrated from Mexico to Los Angeles, California. As we made our migration cycle we were fortunate enough to be found by good Samaritans along the way. These good Samaritans were real people who gave us a shelter to rest and food to nourish and heal our bodies. Unfortunately, on the road to the Mexico/US border, not all migrants are found by the good Samaritan. Many are beaten, robbed and/or die in the desert trying to make their way to the United States. Children and their mothers are immediately sentenced to prison and put in to cages. Some of us living in the United States will say that our migrant brothers and sisters should “stand in line and do it the legal way.” Jesus compels us to follow His footsteps and when it comes to serving our neighbor, to forget about taking calculated steps so that we may live.

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”



Session 4: Immigration

Discussion Questions

- Thinking about the place/space and the socio-political location that you live in, who is your neighbor in the place you live in?
 - How do we become liberated neighbors in our communities?
 - Why do you think the ELCA has an Immigration Social Message? What seems to be its goal?
 - What does it take to create just systemic change – both within and without?
 - 20 years from now, what would you like for the ELCA's Immigration Social Message to say?
-

Prayer

Dios, tu eres un Dios sin papeles. Dios indocumentado.

God, you are a God who does not require any form of documentation like social security cards, green cards, visas or passports. You are an Undocumented God. We ask that you help us follow the Way to life. Continue to give us strength to love you with all of our hearts, mind, soul and actions. As we love you, give us the power to seek justice for our refugee, immigrant and undocumented neighbors. Help us share of our resources to serve our brothers and our sisters without expecting anything in return so that we may have life and life abundant in kinship with each other. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen



Session 5: Health Care

Introduction

[Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor](#) expresses ELCA teaching on health and the health care system. Its vision of health as a shared endeavor rests in a biblical view that wholeness is a blessing God intends for all people. In this vision, a ministry of healing is integral to the life and mission of the Church. This shared endeavor means each person bears some responsibility for his or her own health, but health and health care also depend upon other people and conditions in society and our communities. Guided by this vision, the statement addresses the health care system and its primary areas, from congregations to medical research. It describes broad commitments to guide discernment and work toward change in a political, economic and cultural environment that often is more adversarial than cooperative. This social statement was adopted in by the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Scripture

Jeremiah 8:22

Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

1 Corinthians 16:13

Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do, be done in love.

Matthew 4:23-24

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.



Session 5: Health Care

What is Health?

Sue Ann Glusenkamp, MS, RN

I would like to dedicate this to Dr. Norm Aarestad who sat on the original national task force for this social statement. Dr. Aarestad was a respected member of and voice on Augustana's Health Ministry Team (HMT). He passed away in February, 2020. Dr. Aarestad is greatly missed on our HMT.

When this ELCA social statement on health was released in 2003, I studied it carefully along with my Health Cabinet. At the time I was serving as the Parish Nurse (Faith Community Nurse, FCN) at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota. The Health Cabinet was a group of faithful volunteers who supported and implemented health ministry in their congregation. That was 17 years ago, before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) became law in 2010 and long before the current 2020 pandemic was even a fathomable reality. While I do not remember exact specifics of our study and lively discussions I do clearly remember a consensus that health, healing, and health care definitely require a shared endeavor.

Whenever I lead a discussion on health ministry or faith community nursing practice I begin by posing the question, what is health? Asking participants to reflect and write their personal definition of health reveals a variety of thoughts and individual experiences around this inquiry. Typically, this question solicits words such as absence of disease; healing; wholeness; wellness; balance; recovery; healthy behaviors and cure. I embrace the ELCA Wholeness Wheel as a helpful model to inform and inspire health and health care.



Session 5: Health Care

What is Health? cont'd.

This social statement grounds health and caring for health as people of faith in the principle of stewardship of our blessings from God the Creator, Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer. Indeed, we each have a personal responsibility to care for our body, mind, and spirit as well as a community, mutual obligation to care for one another. Perfect health will never be realized while on earth but together we can strive for abundant life as God intended. Jesus is our role model. Healing of body, mind and spirit was an integral part of his ministry. Matthew 4:23-24 is one example in Scripture from Jesus' ministry of healing and caring.

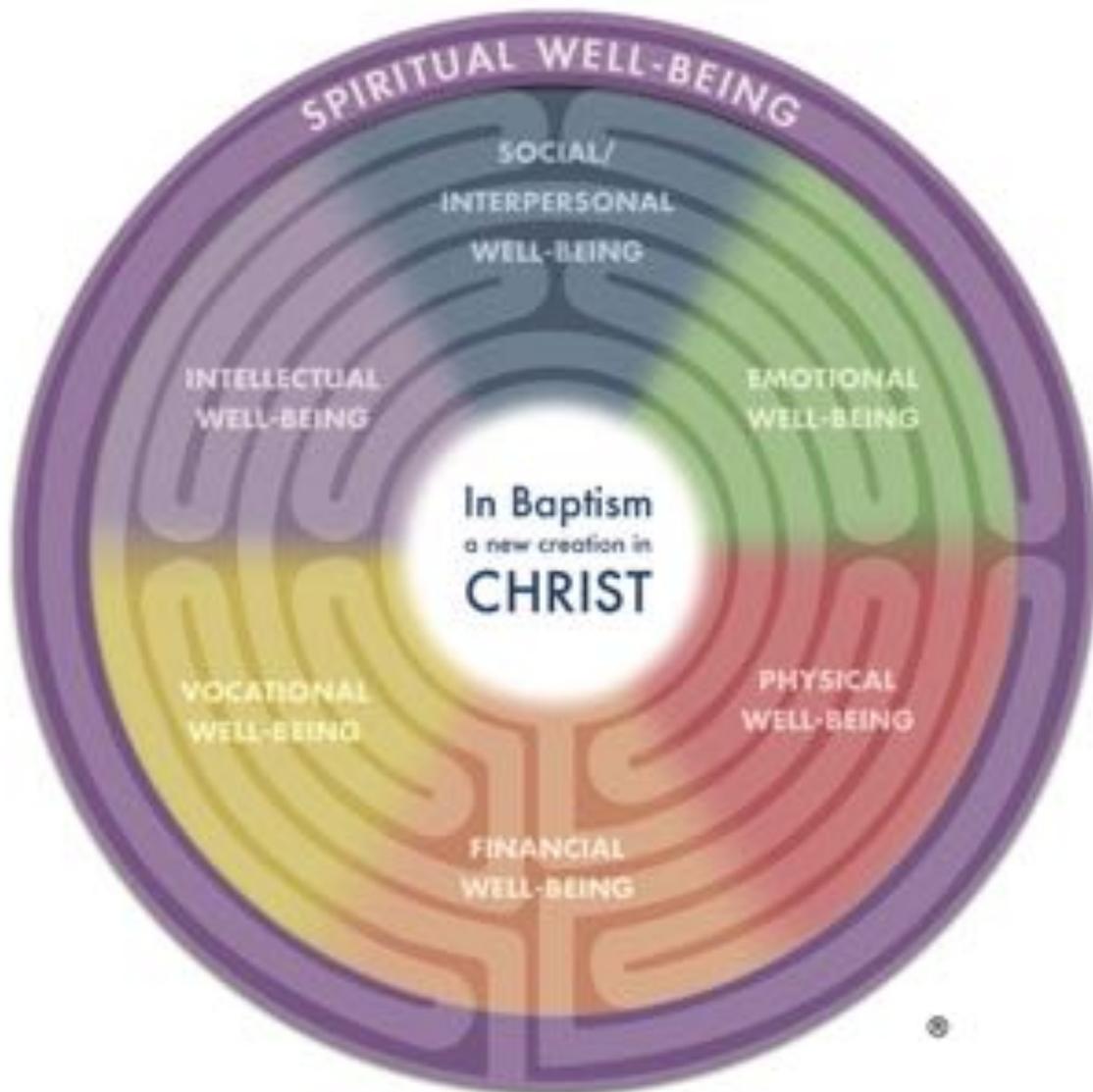
The implementing resolutions enacted by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly and printed in the back of this statement, challenge individuals, congregations, synods, and church-related institutions and organizations to embrace a ministry of healing as an integral part and shared endeavor of the life and mission of our church. It will come as no surprise that I believe each congregation can prioritize and implement health ministry with a faith community nurse staff position led by a health ministry team. Health and wellness can be integrated into all ministries of our church across all developmental ages. Church is a trusted point of access for community resources, health education, advocacy, preventative care, support groups, ethical decisions, as well as local and global health issues, all through the lens of faith.

Particularly in light of today's perplexing pandemic situation, basic access to health care is required. I am grateful for the ACA which made affordable health insurance available to more people.



Session 5: Health Care

Pray the Wholeness Wheel Labyrinth



Trace Your Way Along the Path

*Prayerfully consider
how you experience
each dimension*

Rest in the Center

*Ask God to fill you
with a sense of
peace and purpose*

Follow the Path as it Returns Outward

*Notice your thoughts and
feelings as you listen for
the Spirit's nudges*

Session 5: Health Care

A Calling to Health Care

Rev. Andrea Doeden, MD

I am a child of Lutheran non-clergy missionary parents who decided in the 5th grade that I was being called to be a work in the health care field as a result of my faith. I remember the horrific famines in Africa in the 70s that were broadcast on our TVs and seeing the suffering of the people, knowing that God was suffering with them and calling people to participate in the work of loving and caring for our neighbors by helping them to restore health to their bodies, and the bodies of their families and communities. I ended up becoming an ob/gyn physician, helping global women and children specifically, using the words of Matt 25 as my marching orders. I have always felt that caring for another person is a gift and a way of sharing the love of God and have been grateful that our church understands its calling/mission to be an active participant in seeking health care for all as integral to its' understanding of following Jesus and his way.

Reading this statement during a time of a global pandemic as well as racial unrest in our country was timely. Many of the issues that are at the forefront now are addressed in this document: public health goals as a way to care for the neighbor 'corporately,' poverty and disparities in different communities affecting access as well as experience in the health care system, and resource allocation. I often find myself frustrated by the for profit system we have (when pharmaceutical and insurance companies seek profits for just a few) so the comments addressing the need to stay diligent so profit does not become our motive was really appreciated. I also really connected with the emphasis on health care for all because it is a gift from God—healing (not always a cure) needs to be sought for all people, in all communities; and communities are not equally cared for in our country.



Session 5: Health Care

A Calling to Health Care, cont'd.

Jeremiah cries out in agony for God's poor people asking why their health has not been restored. It rightly states that there are no easy answers and that this church can disagree on exactly how (financially for example) to navigate this moral and ethical obligation but it does not give us ELCA Christians a 'pass' to not do this work.

Every single human will come to a point when our bodies fail us in ways that are stunning and confusing--- we don't understand the why or the logic of the body's changes- and this often brings us to a spiritual crisis. We learn in a visceral embodied way that we truly are not in charge—only God in is control. It is therefore critical that we address the whole person: mind, body, spirit. So many reasons people access the health care are best addressed when we are able to engage in doing this holistic work. And of course, treating one another with the goal of healing requires that we do this in a comprehensive, team approach.

We, me and you, are called to love our neighbor, care for them in tangible ways and seeking the health of all is indeed a critical need now just as it has been in all times. The just and loving thing to do is absolutely to seek the wellness of everyone God has created!



Session 5: Health Care

Discussion Questions

- How does your faith influence your understanding of health and healthcare? What values do you bring to the conversation?
- What can be done to increase the trust that underserved communities have in health care providers or systems?
- How can we act on the mutual responsibility and guard against the ways in which motivation to maximize profit and to market health care like a commodity challenges us? (What can we do?)
- What can you do to witness and work towards the goal of every person having ready access to basic health care services?
- What are your fears and/or concerns about our current health care system? In an ideal world, what would our health care system look like?

Prayer

Healer of our every ill, we give you thanks for continuing redemption of your awesome creation. We ask your blessing on all who provide care for body, mind and spirit. Inspire us to be good stewards of ourselves with healthy behaviors and others by extending a healing hand of care and advocacy. May we be in peace, may we be healed, and may our hearts be opened to caring for health as our shared endeavor. Bring relief to all who suffer this day, especially those affected by injustice, racism, pandemic fear or illness and lack of access to quality health care. We praise you for Jesus role model and ask for strength and courage to reach out in love as Christ loves us. Amen.



Session 6: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Introduction

[Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](#) expresses the ELCA's calling to celebrate culture and ethnicity. This calling commits the ELCA to confront racism, to engage in public leadership, witness and deliberation on these matters, and to advocate for justice and fairness for all people. The statement is grounded in the conviction that the church has been gathered together in the joyful freedom of the reign of God as announced by and embodied in Jesus. That reign has not come in its fullness, but the message of God's yes to the world breaks down all dividing walls as we live into that promise. In daily life, cultural, ethnic and racial differences matter, but they can be seen and celebrated as what God intends them to be – blessings rather than means of oppression and discrimination. We are a church that belongs to Christ, where there is a place for everyone. Christ's church is not ours to control, nor is it our job to sort, divide, categorize or exclude. This statement was adopted by the 1993 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. [credit: elca.org]

Scripture

Ephesians 2:14

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Genesis 16: 1-16



Session 6: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Do You See Us?

Ihoby Rokotomalala

I identify as brown. My people hail from Africa. I attended a Lutheran college and a Lutheran seminary. I've completed candidacy except for ordination because I have not yet been called...I've been searching for call for over a year and a half now. As I write this, demonstrations have been happening around the United States on the account of a black man named George in Minneapolis whose neck was pinned by a white police officer and whose fate was sealed by white society at birth by the color of his skin. Prior to that, a young Black man named Ahmaud was jogging and was shot by two white men in Atlanta.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, do you see us?

Lutherans who are descendants of Norwegians, Swedes, and Germans, do you see us black Lutherans, Indigenous Lutherans, Indonesian Lutherans, and all of us who sit on the spectrum of "white"? Why are you still making jokes equating lutefisk to our denomination? Why not stretch that feast to include Ethiopian injera bread, Mexican tortillas, or Lakota fry bed? Do you remember your mixed, multicultural, and immigrant children who watch how you react to protests? Please stop reacting. Instead, respond. This social statement was written in 1993. Much has happened since then - one of our own shot 9 black church members, we wrote an apology letter to our African-descent siblings, we took a stand on immigration and became a sanctuary church, several of us marched peacefully with our Native American siblings during oil pipeline controversies, and recently Bishop Eaton spoke boldly against white supremacy after Ahmaud died. In some ways, I can't walk all the way with you when you prayer walk around capitol buildings...because I'm still not recognized by our institution as a rostered leader. You pick and choose when you want me. And. I know you're trying.



Session 6: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Do You See Us? cont'd.

If you see us, help us repair or fund our dilapidated buildings and groups. If you see us, speak with us about our understandings of lived, God-breathed resurrection-resilience in the face of blatant denial of our identities. If you see us, please replace “I’m sorry” with “I’m ready to sow and weed now.” May you be as bold as Hagar, a fleeing Egyptian slave, who first dared to name the Holy One as El Roi: “the God who sees me.

The Hard Work is Still Ahead

The Rev. Wes Dunbar

In 1988 when the ELCA was birthed one of our original commitments was: 10% diversity in 10 years. “What a fantastic idea!” I thought. We were woefully inadequate at connecting with people of color. By 1993 the Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture Social Statement was approved, calling us to look more carefully at ourselves, and to repent of our faltering. We had a long way to go. Were we up to the task?

During my Lutheran year in the candidacy process (1994-5) I searched for something fresh in my studies of Lutheran theology and its importance for today. What hit me like a ton of bricks was “Reconciliation”. I set out to study, write, and commit myself to the ministry of reconciliation. Ephesians 2:14 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, were my foundations. Once ordained in 1996 I recognized how great we were doing in the ELCA with ecumenical relations and even with inter-faith dialogues. But in race relations we were still stuck in our old ways.



Session 6: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

The Hard Work is Still Ahead cont'd

It is 24 years later, we see racial tensions all around us in policing, income inequality, employment, sports, education and especially the church. Dr. King said decades ago, “The most segregated hour of the week is Sunday morning at 10 A.M.” We say many good things, but our actions are dragging behind. The outline for what and how to change was agreed on in 1993. The hard work is still ahead.

In October I attended a “Dismantling Racism” workshop. Working through my own issues around race and engaging in serious conversation about dismantling racism, I saw the necessity to do this work with my congregation as well. I committed to make 2020 a year of preaching and teaching about racism. Little did I realize in a few months we would be, once again, up in smoke and on each other’s necks with visceral race relations. Can we heal the hurt and correct America’s original sin?

“The most segregated hour of the week is
Sunday morning at 10 A.M.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Session 6: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Discussion Questions

- What events, people, and experiences in your life formed your opinions on race, ethnicity and culture?
 - This statement was written in the early 1990s. How does it fare today in addressing the contemporary public conversation on race?
 - How do you respond to experiences of public racism, i.e., comments made by family, friends, or strangers?
 - How does your understanding of who God is and what God is doing in the world impact your perceptions about race, ethnicity and culture?
-

Prayer

Holy Spirit who wanders in the wilderness of our questions, you are the breath that makes us alive. God who heals and challenges us, thank you for the resilience of our siblings, those who suffered at our hands, and those who we forget or wish to not see. Please strengthen our voices to echo your love, move our hands, and open our eyes to see you in our beloved neighbor. May our being exemplify your unfailing justice for all your creation. Amen.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Introduction

[The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries](#) presents a comprehensive perspective on matters related to the U.S. criminal justice system and the many communities affected by this system. The statement affirms the principles of the U.S. criminal justice system but also reveals the desperate cries that reflect the system's serious deficiencies. It recognizes that many people in the system serve their professional vocations with competent and humane performance. Yet it also recognizes that current approaches, such as the emphasis on mass incarceration, impose significant costs on all involved in the system and on society as a whole. These approaches are founded on an underlying punitive mindset and persistent inequalities based on race and class. Drawing from the biblical witness to God's rich forms of love and justice for all people, the ELCA is compelled by a holy yearning to address the need for changing public attitudes and postures, and to call for dramatic reforms in policies and practices in the criminal justice system. This statement was adopted by the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. [credit: elca.org]

Scripture

Jer. 29:12-14

Then when you call upon me and come to pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart. I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Cups Clanging for Change

The Rev. Richard Gianzero

When the movie *Just Mercy* came out I trembled. I read the book when it came out and trembled then. I became a Christian in prison in the early 1990s and tremble every time a new documentary, book, or movie depicts the reality of prison. I tremble because I know all too well the cruelty of prison. At age 16 I became another soul incarcerated on the modern plantation.

Guilty of crime yes...personal responsibility yes...individual accountability yes...a teenager in the adult prison system facing the brutality of a plantation industry yes...

People often ask me to describe prison. I've shared parts of my story and amendment of life in quite a few places. I can only paint pictures with words to capture scenes. These scenes portray small hues and shades of what lurks in the shadows of the plantation canvass. They illustrate scenes of pain, guilt, suffering, despair, abuse, cruelty, longing and storm. Sometimes I remember the sounds of prison and the rare but eerie silence, which offers no solace, after the cups clanged.

In *Just Mercy*, when a man was led to the electric chair for execution the cups clanged. Those imprisoned beat their cups on the cell doors' bars. It was a state of emergency with no ambulance of relief in sight. The shrill noise of the cups clanging made me tremble.

The cups often clang in prisons and jails. In those eerie moments of deafening silence, around 2AM, cups sometimes clang. A medical emergency in the cell next to mine - the cups clang. A seizure...a heart attack...an emotional breakdown...a mental health confinement crisis...a spiritual assault choking the soul of the incarcerated body...the cups clang and rip through the heavy air and made us tremble.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Cups Clanging for Change cont'd

When someone is beaten in prison the cups clang. A Black Man was beaten, after being handcuffed and slammed face down, in front of my eyes in prison shortly after I turned 17. The cups clanged as we stood behind locked cells watching. I would see it again...and again...I heard the officers and prison officials walk the cell block gallery joking and laughing about how that "Black Man" (insert the n-word) sh*t himself after they beat him. Brutality was sport. And the cups clanged.

The cups are clanging in the world today. What some people could not believe they now see because of cell phone footage capturing individual acts of police brutality, which speaks to the larger culture of abuse in law enforcement. Imprisoned people do not have recording devices because recording is forbidden in prisons. The culture of cruelty, however, intensifies in law enforcement practices within prisons.

Our ELCA statement captures many issues facing the United States. Due to the movements to change law enforcement culture happening right now we need to connect the dots between the disproportionate rates of imprisonment between Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples and the US general population. We need to connect the dots between the over-policing of communities of color and the economic incentives attached to incarcerating people and why targeting communities of color is historically done with impunity by law enforcement. This is a macro-level call to education, advocacy, and activism which implores people of faith to question the morality and ethics of a prosperous society, on one hand, and an oppressive society, on the other hand, which incarcerates over 2 million people. For a more chilling statistic, which demonstrates the connections of over-policing and racism, consider that at any time today, as you read this, 30% of all young Black men between the ages of 20-29 will be in a jail or prison cell.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Cups Clanging for Change cont'd

Future conversations and calls to action need to address micro-level realities of the prison industrial complex. These include the issues of physical, sexual, and substance abuse most often perpetrated by correction officers and correction employees. For example, the majority of drugs and contraband flowing through prisons are brought in by corrections officers. The connection between corrections' unions and the ability to defy orders from higher ranking corrections' staff also allow frontline officers and supervisors to abuse and exploit with impunity.

When I share my story, I always refer to my crimes as "crimes." As a person and pastor who seeks integrity, I understand the liberating freedom of confession and forgiveness, repentance and amendment of life. This is the call of the cross to look upward at the length to which God goes to redeem through Jesus's crucifixion. At the same time, the prison industrial complex, understood as the logical consequence of over-policing and targeting of communities of color, betrays its label as a "corrections" component of the criminal justice system. The system thrives because it makes money and represents an industrial enterprise exploiting the historic vulnerabilities of the poor in general and people of color in particular. It is important to me that my personal journey of redemption and accountability amplifies the call for systemic change and even abolition of the prison industrial complex.

I hope to meet you in conversation across the Rocky Mountain Synod as we seek to live into the gospel imperative of justice as expressed in our ELCA social statements.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Hope and God's Justice

The Rev. Terry Schjang

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

[Jer. 29: 12]

These words of promise are spoken by the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon. He speaks to them in letters from afar in Jerusalem because he cannot be with them physically. Rather than telling them to pray to get back home to Jerusalem as fast as they can, he encourages them to pray for those who hold them captive, to continue to worship, to understand they are in this for what will feel like too long to bear, and to remember who they are: beloved children of God.

This is our starting point inside Denver Women's Correctional Facility. Whether it is a woman's first experience with incarceration or her seventh; whether she's been down for six months or sixteen years, living inside the walls of barbed wire estranged from the activities of our communities outside, feels like exile.

The cries of "how long LORD?" go largely unheard except by their sisters who have the presence of mind to listen, and by someone called by the Spirit to listen and respond with Christ's promise. It is a promise the women hear clearly through the words of the prophet, Jeremiah, as he tells other exiles to amend their ways and their doings because God has a plan for them for a future with hope. No one benefits within the system of incarceration if there is no hope.

From my perspective as one called to serve this vulnerable community, hope begins with encouraging the incarcerated to hear Christ speaking to them. Christ promises them they too are beloved. They too belong to community.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Hope and God's Justice, cont'd.

Christ has a plan for them. They have a purpose in life. They are much more than a number or the worst thing they ever did in their life. They belong to God, and God has a plan for them. There is hope.

As pastor and chaplain inside this prison, I often encourage the women to not only hear the promise of hope for themselves, but to acknowledge that we're all leveled at the cross. This means that instead of mirroring the attitude of society outside that too often declares one's self-worth according to our own accomplishments or lack of public misdeeds, we, as a faith community, encourage everyone to understand one's self-worth in terms of the cross.

It is at the cross that we understand who God is and that the cross forms us all as sisters and brothers equally in Christ. All, regardless of on what side of a wall we reside, are siblings at the foot of the cross.

This is God's justice; not an eternity of gnashing of teeth behind barbed wire. Mercy, kindness and a humble walk together is justice in God's court. In the words of Brian McLaren, "We make the road by walking", and I will add the word, "together". We, as a church, have fallen short of the common life together we confess when we fail to acknowledge our sisters and brothers behind bars.

"Togetherness" is where the church has fallen short in her principles and orientation toward justice. We are called to visit the prisoner (Matthew 25:36) and yet so many of us who call ourselves people of faith openly say, "well, they did something bad, didn't they? They deserve to be in prison. Why should they be given anything besides food and shelter?"



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Hope and God's Justice, cont'd.

I can't count the number of times people have said to me, "you have the worst call in the entire church. Couldn't you get anything better?" Even now, these voices leave me speechless.

Which leads me to my final point, the importance of encouraging all who have been affected by the current system of incarceration to find their voice. My own sense of call is to walk with incarcerated women, whether or not they were wrongly or rightly convicted, encouraging them to find their voice. This includes expressing their remorse to their victims, repentance, sharing their grief and sorrow with their parents and children, and praying with their incarcerated sisters to give them hope along the way. The walk is long-- a proverbial 70 years.

Much still needs to be addressed systemically in the criminal justice system. This reflection doesn't even begin to address the cultural injustice of the imbalance of incarcerated persons along the racial and less educated divide. It doesn't begin to address the misuse of incarceration for the mentally ill and the drug addicted. It doesn't begin to address the culture of domestic violence against women that lands women in prison for crimes others committed against their children.

Instead, this reflection will begin and end with the vision of hope as God encourages us to hear, that we along with our siblings behind barbed wire, are all experiencing some sort of feeling of exile from life as we think we would design it if we were God. But we are not God. I walk into the prison in these days of COVID 19, and the women walking their laps in the yard to get some exercise and sunshine shout out, "Hi, Pastor Terry. Come walk with me!" They know shouting across the yard is against the prison rules. The officers in the yard look at me and shake their finger at me. Then they smile and motion for me to go walk with my sisters.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Hope and God's Justice, cont'd.

There is hope. The system is changing. The church needs to hear the cries of the people and join in the walk. We are not all the same. Still, we are all called to walk together according to our ability and talents.

"Then when you call upon me and come to pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart. I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." (Jer. 29:12-14)

May it be so.



Session 7: Criminal Justice

Discussion Questions

- What is compassionate suffering and what gets in the way of providing it as a part of our criminal justice system?
- How has the criminal justice system intersected your life?
- What does it mean as a church in today's world to find our voice?
- Spiritually, what does it mean to walk together, making new roads?

Prayer

God of justice, for our sake your Son was condemned as a criminal. Visit our jails and prisons with your judgment and mercy. Remember all prisoners; bring the guilty to repentance and amendment of life according to your will; and give hope for the future. When any are held unjustly, raise up for them advocates to bring them release and give us the wisdom to improve our system of justice. Watch over those who work in these institutions; give them strength and compassion, and keep them from becoming brutal or callous. Lead us to do for those in prison what we would do for Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

(Prisons and correctional institutions, ELW, P. 80)



Session 8: Sexism

Introduction

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action expresses several deep Christian themes. Grounded in God's intention of abundant life for all, it confesses patriarchy and sexism as sin. It names the resources of the Lutheran faith to address this sin and identifies what needs to be done both in the church and in society. The social statement is titled a "call to action" because it is precisely this. It urges members to recognize patriarchy and sexism as sinful and invoke systemic changes that foster abundant, flourishing life for all persons within both church and society.

In addition, Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action serves as the ELCA's response to the Lutheran World Federation's "Gender Justice Policy," which calls on all 148 member churches within the LWF to do work within their individual churches to foster gender justice.

Scripture

Revelation 22:1-2

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.



Session 8: Sexism

Learning New Language

Rev. Christine Higuera-Street

The verses from Revelation paint an image of creation restored, but it is the next verse that strengthens the fullness of what is to come. *Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.*(22:3a) Clinging to this vision is one of the reasons I wear black on Thursdays. It is a simple action to bring attention to the World Council of Churches Thursdays in Black campaign against gender-based violence. Our global community is a long way from ending the sins of our ancestors which are firmly entrenched and “normalized” in our lives today.

Centuries of patriarchy, sexism, racism, classism, and more are intertwined as a systemic social structure in dire need of dismantling so that healing can begin. As God’s beloved, we are called to “sin no more” and the hard work must begin with us. While sorting out the many facets of this complex issue, a good place to start is with something as simple as using inclusive language.

When I came across Gail Ramshaw’s book, *God Beyond Gender*, it gave me permission to think of God in much broader images than what I had learned. Today, I find that inclusive language to describe our triune God is liberating, creative, expansive, and enlightening. While the ELCA is committed to supporting developing inclusive language for liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational materials, there are still some areas where we fall short and revert to our patriarchal and sexist heritage.

There is still much to do, and it starts with congregations willing to take steps in assuring that our children are taught who God is beyond the image of an old man in a distant heaven or that the Spirit is more like the wind and not a ghost. It takes learning new language to describe the images of God beyond human likenesses.



Session 8: Sexism

Created in God's Image

Rev. Dr. Shauna Hannan

One of the most influential statements I heard in the church growing up was, "Jesus loves you just as you are. Nothing can separate you from that love." I believed it. I still believe it. However, believing it makes it all the more confusing when it doesn't ring true in my experience or in the experiences of the people around me.

There is no doubt that certain systems of this world subtly (and not-so-subtly) diminish the gifted, beloved and worthy nature of women and girls. As the most recent ELCA social statement, "Faith, Sexism, and Justice," makes clear, "Though God desires fullness of life and equity for everyone, as a church we recognize that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to sex (biological), gender, or both" (3).

Now you might think as I do, "I respect all." But "we are socialized to conform to these patterns of power, privilege, and prejudice. This makes us complicit in maintaining social systems of oppression" (4). Because the power of this socialization is real, our Lutheran church says, "no," to systems that provoke such harm and justice and does so for theological, biblical and, frankly, basic humanitarian reasons. Two poignant claims about who God is and how God relates to us can indeed shape our humanitarian impulses and deeply impact gender justice.

First, we have a God who creates us in God's image. What? Really? Why would a divine being do something so risky, so vulnerable? While I cannot say why, I do trust that people of all genders are created in God's image. Thus, systems that suppress the sacredness of any gender are not a reflection of the fullness of our creator.



Session 8: Sexism

Created in God's Image, cont'd.

While systems in this world unjustly deny the sacredness of all genders, Jesus does not. I believe that. And this social statement confirms that our church believes that. Being this church “compels us to expose how patriarchy and sexism are woven into individual, social, and religious life, causing harm to all people and even to all of creation” (8) and summons us to find ways to create systems that reflect the belief that justice is for all.

I find it helpful to think about a way forward in terms of language, leadership and legislation. The following sections of the social statements are especially helpful for consideration and conversation.

- 1) **Language.** See pp. 8, 30, 53-55.
- 2) **Leadership.** See pp. 55-58.
- 3) **Legislation.** See Part V: Response: The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society. See especially advocacy section pp. 60-68.

*Mothering God, you gave me birth
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of ev'ry breath,
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.*

*Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of new life, and grape of love,
your very body for my peace.*

*Mothering Spirit, nurt'ring one,
in arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow
until I flow'r, until I know.*

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Session 8: Sexism

Discussion Questions

- Because all humans are made in the image of God, consider how the variety of humans you know reflect who God is. Does your image of God change when you consider this?
 - Name other theological convictions (i.e., characteristics of who God is and how God acts in our lives) that shape how we might understand and live into gender justice.
 - Historically, art has been important as part of the church's culture and many congregations still have images that reinforce the ideology of patriarchy. What sort of images does your congregation have which fall into this category? What sort of images do not?
 - Where are the places that still predominantly use masculine language in the church? Where has it changed to be more inclusive and expansive?
-

Prayer

Creator God, we pray that the accursed sins of our ancestors embedded in our hearts today, may be washed away. We recognized that we cannot do this on our own but depend upon the Spirit to pierce our hearts and awaken our minds from the lethargic slumber of apathy and complacency. Place in our hearts the powerful and refining fire of justice. We pray this all in Jesus' name, Amen.



LIVING FAITH: CHURCH IN SOCIETY



*A Reconciling in Christ Synod
An AMMPARO Welcoming Synod*



Rocky Mountain Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.