

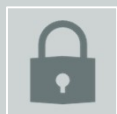
Church in the World



Looking at the ELCA's
Social Statements



Ground Rules





Confidentiality



Assumed Innocence



Opinions = Individuals, Not Whole Communities



“Jesus's ministry was a public ministry in which he repeatedly addressed difficult issues among crowds, with religious authorities, at dinner parties, or in the Temple in Jerusalem, and did so from the tradition of Moses and the prophets, the Psalms, and the Hebrew sages.”

Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues (1999)

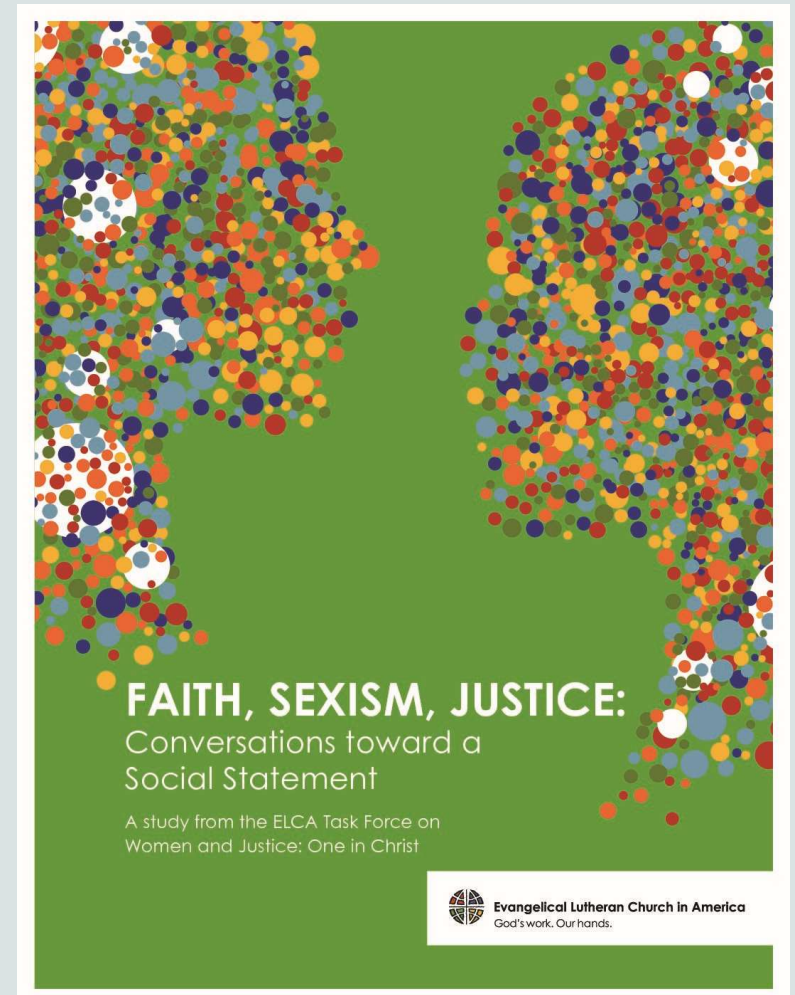
What do you know about the ELCA Social Statements?

Topics? Process? Reason?



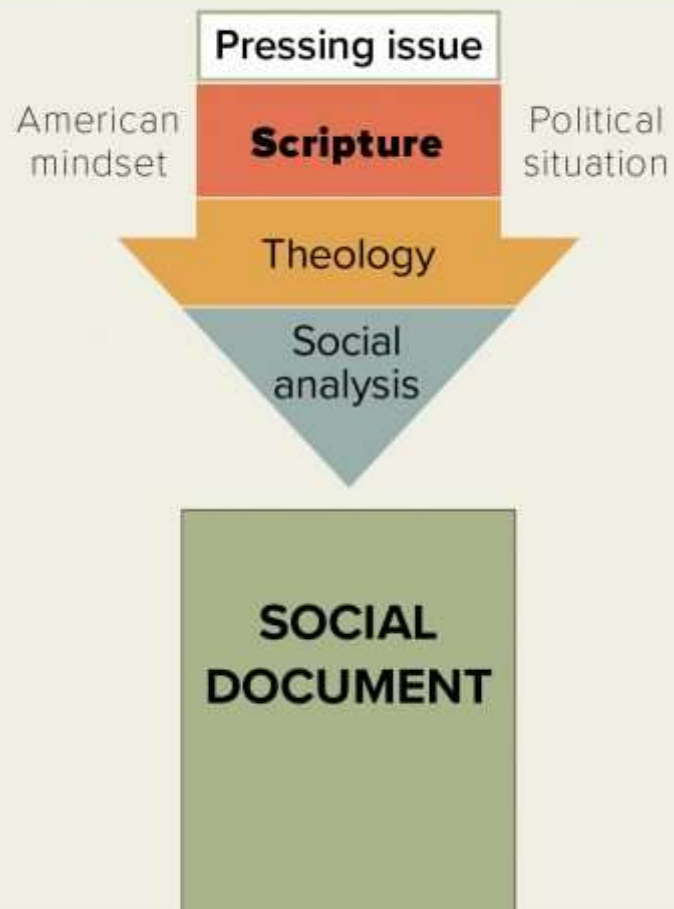
Overview

- Teaching documents
 - “They bring the Christian Scriptures and Lutheran theology into dialogue with social analysis regarding broad social institutions and questions or the most controversial social topics.”
- Provide: analysis of an issue, basic theological and ethical perspectives, vocational insight, and provide guidance for conversation and action
- “Social teaching documents aren’t confessional or litmus tests...” – Roger Willer, Director for Theological Ethics



<https://www.lutheranadvocacy.org/elca-churchwide-assembly-adopts-faith-sexism-and-justice-social-statement/>

WHAT GOES INTO MAKING A SOCIAL DOCUMENT?



Statement vs. Message

SOCIAL STATEMENTS

- Taskforce Led
- Address Wider Social Issues, Urging Conversation and Discernment
- 5-Year Development Process of Study & Widespread Moral Discernment
- Voted on by Churchwide Assembly
- Authoritative and Comprehensive Documents
- Set Policy and Guide the ELCA's Advocacy Efforts

SOCIAL MESSAGES

- Theological Discernment Team
- Address Timely Social Issues, Urging Conversation and Action
- Reviewed by Conference of Bishops & Voted on by Church Council
- Dependent on and Consistent with Social Statements
- Topics Include: Terrorism, Suicide Prevention, Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, Homelessness, AIDS

Topics

- Abortion (1991)
- Caring For Creation (1993)
- Church in Society (1991)
- The Church & Criminal Justice (2013)
- The Death Penalty (1991)
- Economic Life (1999)
- Education (2007)
- Genetics (2011)
- Health & Health Care (2003)
- Human Sexuality (2009)
- Peace (1995)
- Race, Ethnicity, & Culture (1993)
- Sexism (2019)

Example & Foundation

- The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective (1991)
- Affirmations
 - Concern and advocacy as response to God's grace; freed to serve
 - Restless and discontent "with the world's brokenness and violence" – p. 3
 - God institutes government; but sin is still present in the world
 - Moral Deliberation – attention to God's Word and God's world
- Commitments
 - "This church shall develop social statements ... that will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty." (Church in Society, 7)

The Death Penalty (1991)

- A Climate of Violence
 - Breaks down trust and social bonds, as well as breeding fear of neighbor
- Affirmation
 - “God entrusts the state with power to take human life when failure to do so constitutes a clear danger to society. However, this does not mean that governments have an unlimited right to take life.” p. 2
- Restorative Justice
 - As shown by Jesus, “addressing the hurt of each person whose life has been touched by violent crime” p. 3

The Death Penalty: In Opposition

- Executions
 - “represent an unacceptable, non-restorative approach to violent crime”
 - “reinforce social injustice”
 - “The death penalty cannot possibly be administered justly.”

“The practice of the death penalty undermines any possible moral message we might want to ‘send.’ It is not fair and fails to make society better or safer. The message conveyed by an execution, reflected in the attention it receives from the public, is one of brutality and violence.” p. 4

The Death Penalty: Commitments

- As a community gathered in faith...
- As a community dispersed in daily life...
- As a community of moral deliberation...
- As a church organized for mission...



God and Social Institutions

- “Society and the Church Universal are gifts from God.” p. 13
 - “Social systems are necessary because we are relational beings.” p. 37
- “God’s Law commands us to love God above all else and to live for the sake of the common good.” p. 22
- “God’s Law permeates and undergirds basic structures of human society to support life and protect all people ... Justice is the measure by which God’s Law guides and assesses these basic structures. Social structures and institutions that fail to do justice are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created them. **They must be challenged and held accountable; this is a matter of great urgency because human life depends upon them.**”

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action (2019)

- Confesses patriarchy and sexism as sin, points to the Lutheran faith as an aid in addressing this sin, and holds that “living in hope, we are called to action” p. 68
- 40 Articles
 - Fundamental Teachings: 1-8
 - Analysis of the Problem: 9-15
 - The Christian Tradition: 16-22
 - Response as a Church: 23-30
 - Response in Society: 31-40



Fundamental Teachings: *God desires abundant life for all.*

- God's self-revelation through Scripture
 - “Jesus Christ embodied God's urgent and persistent desire for the well-being of all people yesterday, today, tomorrow, and in the promises future.” p. 15
- Created in God's image
- Presence of Sin
 - “Human desire to be powerful disrupts God's intention for human flourishing and for the well-being of creation.” p. 19
- Neighbor Love and Neighbor Justice
- Living as the Body of Christ



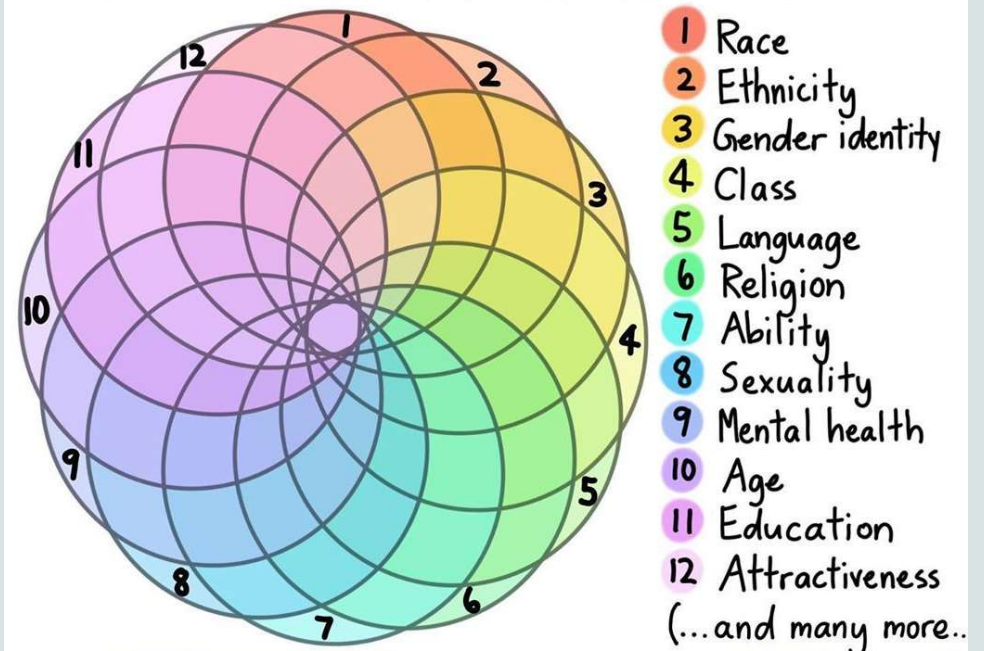
Analysis of Problem:
Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.

“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.” p. 25

“**Intersectionality** refers to the ways in which various forms of discrimination and oppression, linked to aspects of a person's identity, overlap.” p. 25

“... each person is uniquely created in God's image and ... each persons' identity consists of different aspects.” p. 25

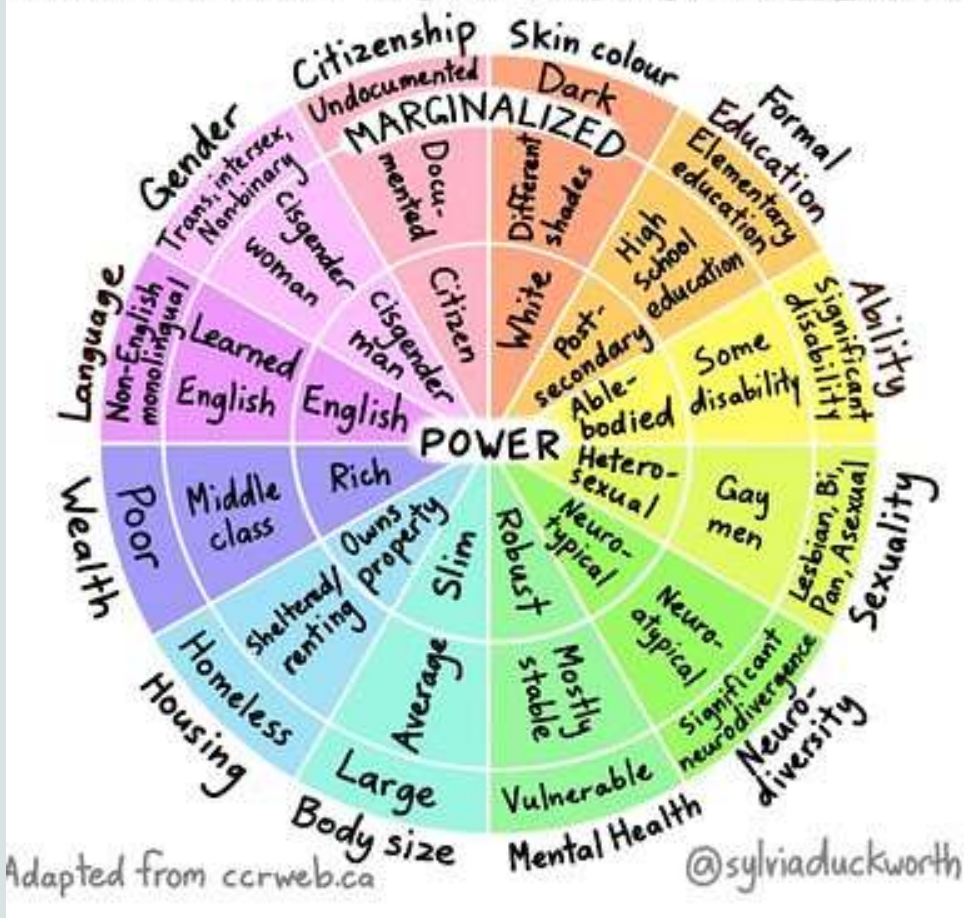
INTERSECTIONALITY



Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

— Kimberlé Crenshaw —

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



Sylvia Duckworth, sylviaaduckworth.com

“What the dominant culture affirms affects people’s lives.” p. 26

“Legal, social, and religious forces continue to curb women’s and girl’s rights and prevent them from affirming, celebrating, and expressing themselves fully as God’s good creatures and flourishing.” p. 27

“Because people live within social and religious systems, everyone knowingly or unknowingly participates in this patriarchal system.”

Although the dominant culture in the United States often emphasizes individualism, the Scriptures and human reason also stress the importance of social or communal understandings of life and the world. To respond in love to the problems experienced by women ... we must move beyond individual experiences to analyze how patriarchy functions as a social system. **This church believes we need to address the roots of the problems that threaten abundant life.**” p. 31





“In our liturgy, we name this systemic reality in the confession: ‘We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.’ Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we can identify it as sin, confess it, and, through the grace and strength of God, begin to act differently. We reject patriarchy and sexism as sinful because they deny the truth that all people are created equally in God’s image and because they disrupt joy, gladness, and flourishing life for all people.” p. 38

The Christian Tradition: *It is both challenge and resource.*

- “God’s Law helps us to see that we sin and judges us for our failure to live up to God’s intentions. The recognition of our sins leads us to confession.” p. 39
- “A Lutheran reading of the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally.” p. 40

Response: *Called to New Commitments and Actions as a Church*

- Acknowledge the contexts in which Scripture was written and reject the misuse of Scripture to support sexist beliefs and patriarchal structures
- “The church calls upon its teachers and theologians to work towards worthier expressions of the historic faith that honor God’s desire for all people to thrive.” p. 52
- Use of expansive language for humankind and for expansive and inclusive language for God, “[reflecting] faithfulness to God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures...” p. 55
- Promote equitable authority and leadership in the ELCA and all its expressions, with special concern for women of color
- Promote economically just changes, especially relating to pay and benefits

Response: *Calls for Actions and Commitments in Society*

- “Advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices which respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying or devaluing them” p. 9
- Advocate and support the eradication of gender-based violence
- “Advocate for and support medical research, health care delivery, and access to equitable and affordable health care services, including reproductive health care” p. 10
- Advocate for and support means for increasing women's participation in local, state, and national politics, especially those who face intersecting forms of oppression



Human Sexuality: Gift & Trust (2009)

- "... because God's promises are trustworthy, each of us is called in Christian freedom to be trustworthy in our relationships with one another and to build social institutions and practices that create trust." p. 36
- "Because of the love of the [God], we are a people set free for lives of responsibility committed to seeking the good of all." p. 36
- "Seeks to describe the social realities of this age and to address them pastorally." p. 37



2009 Churchwide Assembly August 17-23, Minneapolis, MN

- 17th - “Human Sexuality: Gift & Trust” Adopted by Two-Thirds Vote
- Ministry Policy Resolutions; all adopted by simple majority vote
 - Resolution 3 – “in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to ... Love the neighbor respect the bound consciences of all.”
 - Resolution 1 – Allows congregations the choice to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable “lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships”
 - Resolution 2 – “the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.”
 - Resolution 4 – Included: the ELCA called on members to respect of the bound conscience of others; removed prohibition of LGBTQ+ rostered leaders; recognized and committed to respect those who believe the ELCA should not call or roster LGBTQ+ people

Fundamental Teachings: Justification

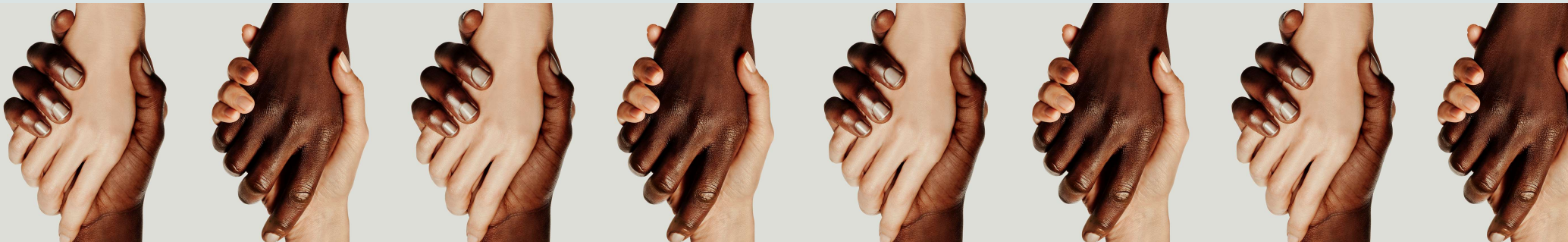


- “Justification is the forgiveness of sins, liberation from the dominating power of sin and death and from the curse of the law.” JDDJ
 - *Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone*
- **Christ Alone:** purpose of Scripture is to reveal Christ to us; we are to interpret through the lens of his death and resurrection as salvation for all
- **Grace Alone:** There is nothing we can do to put ourselves in right relationship with God, only God’s grace can do that.
- **Faith Alone:** Through hearing God’s Word, the Holy Spirit ignites faith within us; our faith allows us to turn to God in trust
- Sin = not about keeping/breaking rules, but about turning away from God and looking to ourselves as powerful

Fundamental Teachings: Vocation of Service

- “It is only through Christ that we can turn in faith to trust God, which leads immediately to our baptismal vocation to love and serve the neighbor.” p. 3
- “Lutherans understand that active engagement in the world is integral to Christian identity.” p. 3
 - Set free by Christ, we are sent back into the world to live in God’s promises
 - Service as response to God’s grace

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”



Fundamental Teachings: Continuing Creation & Social Ethic

- Genesis:
 - God desires close, trusting relationship with us AND between humans
 - Sexuality is a gift from God which can enhance one's life
 - We sin, yet God remains faithful to us and God's promises. God does not abandon us, but is faithful and trustworthy
- In response to God's trustworthiness, "we seek to be trustworthy in our ... sexuality and to build social institutions ... where trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive." Summary, p. 1



Trust & Human Sexuality

- Complexity: “Sexuality finds expression at the extreme ends of human experience: in love, care, and security, or lust, cold indifference, and exploitation.” p. 11
 - Source of deep connection and emotional fulfillment; can also cause deep harm and hurt to ourselves and our neighbor
- Social Trust & the Common Good: Trust undergirds healthy relationships, households, and families; social trust undergirds healthy communities and societies.
 - When we serve our neighbor instead of our self interest, we are acting in ways to enhance social trust
 - Goes beyond private action to how legal/commercial/civic structures are shaped for the common good
- Establishing Trust: No human relationship can thrive without trust; we are called to establish it, modeled after God’s trustworthiness, mercy, and compassion



Social Structures & Trust: *Marriage*

- Commitment = stronger relationship and safer space for vulnerability, growth, possible procreation and the nurturing of children
- Marriage = 1 woman + 1 man
- Public promises also protect the community by holding folks accountable to their vows



Social Structures & Trust

- Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; also founded on trust
- Lutherans oppose all forms of verbal/physical harassment or assault based on orientation; supports legal rights to protect vulnerable communities
- The church does not agree on the “place of such relationships within the Christian community.” p. 19

Bound Conscience

- Luther's 1521 heresy trial: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God." p. 41
 - Conscience as a Christian's internal sense of self and one's understanding of right and wrong action as founded on Scripture, the Living Word of God
- When salvation is not at stake, as in the case of sexuality, Christians are called to "give priority to the neighbor's well-being and will protect the conscience of the neighbor, who may well view the same question in such a way as to affect faith." p. 41
 - Again, our actions and beliefs do not save us, only God's grace saves us
- Thus, the Church can live out its mission and ministry in the world even with these differences in beliefs

Bound Conscience

- “Some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and ... natural law... [this] behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. They ... conclude that the neighbor/the community are best served by calling [LGBTQ+ people] to repentance ... and to a celibate lifestyle.”
- Some say this “reflect[s] a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended. [These] relationships may be lived out with mutuality and care, they do not believe that [they should be called a marriage].”
- “Some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today.”
 - Some of which “do not equate these relationships with marriage” yet understand the desire of a supportive faith community and having such relationship blessed
 - Others still see these relationships as worthy of the standard of marriage and the same legal and social rights and protections that heterosexual couples receive

Social Structures & Trust



- Family:
 - “While Scripture places family as secondary to the community of God’s people, it also attests to the family’s foundational role in protecting and nurturing human community.” p. 22-23
 - Raising/nurturing children, teaching trust, protecting the vulnerable
 - Critical issue is not conventional form but how it “performs indispensable individual and social tasks.” p. 25
- Protection of Youth/Children:
 - “Safety within and outside a family is [vital] because the damage done to children and youth through sexual abuse and molestation can be remarkably deep and long lasting.” p. 25
 - Congregations and ministry sites must be safe places for children and youth

Sexuality & Trust in Relationships

- Sexuality & Self:
 - “Throughout our lives we need to find life-enhancing and appropriate ways of giving expression to [our sexuality].” p. 28
 - Healthy body image; learning to be comfortable in our bodies allows us to entrust ourselves and our bodies to others
- Gender & Friendship:
 - Friends can help us grow in our self-understanding and give healthy companionship
- Commitment & Sexuality:
 - Intimacy should correspond with commitment
- Sexual Intimacy & Adult Cohabitation:
 - Prohibited; church should work against forces which push people towards cohabitation

Sexuality & Social Responsibility

- Sexuality & Society:
 - Major influence on sexuality and sexual behaviors
 - “The sexual body is never to be used as an object for commercial purposes.” p. 34
 - Supports development/use of medical products that support fulfilling and responsible sexuality; supports sex education about STIs without teaching that sex is “intrinsically dirty or dangerous.” p. 35
- Sexuality & Public Ministry
- Sexuality & the Workplace
 - The workplace can “be rendered sexually offensive and hostile by the conduct of co-workers.” p. 36

Some Resolutions

- “Commit themselves to finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreement.” p. 43
- Work to develop liturgical resources to be used at the time of divorce
- Encourage the development of resources for “children, middle school and high school youth, and their parents for understanding Christian values and making responsible choices” p. 43
- Recognize church organizations which foster and support friendships and celebrate the value of strong friendships
- Call upon the church to encourage the availability and funding of comprehensive sex education programs in public schools and Lutheran private schools

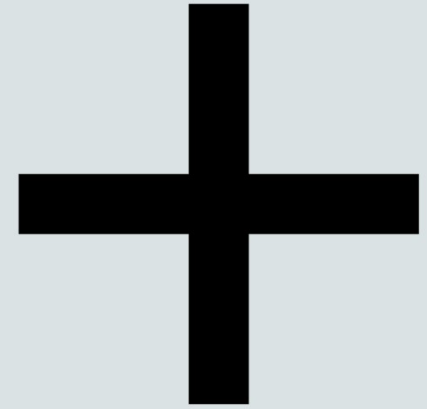


The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries (2013)

- “affirms the fundamental principles of the U.S. criminal justice system such as due process of law and the presumption of legal innocence. Yet, this church hears people's cries that reflect the current system's serious deficiencies. Drawing from the biblical witness to God's wondrously rich forms of love and justice, we are compelled by a “holy yearning” to address the need for a change in public mindset and for dramatic reforms in policies and practices.” p. 1

Marks of the Church

- Confession
 - “To confess one’s sins centers accountability and can lead both to the truth being told and justice being done. In confession God is invoked as the one who brings to human brokenness the fullness of new life.” p. 6
 - “In confessing complicity in injustice, this church invokes both the judgment and the wise guidance of God.” p. 7
- Compassionate Suffering
 - “... the Holy Spirit sanctifies the church in relation to the neighbor.” p. 7

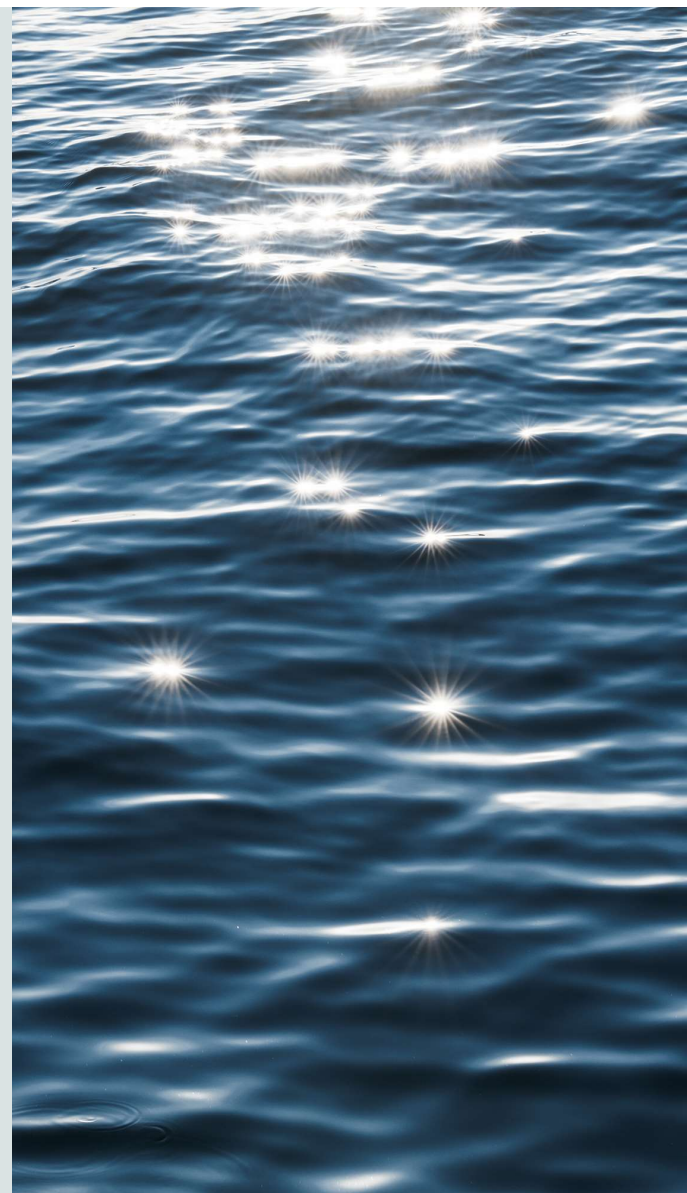


Assessing the System

- Affirms purpose and goals of the criminal justice system and states:
 - “The failure to achieve a well-ordered system of criminal justice imposes grievous costs on everyone involved in the system, and on society as a whole.” p. 8
- Victims
- Law Enforcement, Judicial System
 - Stress and toll on personal life, racial bias and use of excessive force, high caseloads and lack of resources (greater stress and less attention to individual cases)
- Corrections
 - Means of crime deterrence, rehabilitation, or incapacitation
 - Retribution or Restoration
- Confronting Racism; Reentry; Immigration Detention

Justice and Yearning

- Twofold Justice & Civil Order
 - “Justice speaks about social relations and the need to create, exercise, or restore right relationship between and among individuals in community.” p. 16
 - Same Root: God’s desire for wholeness in creation
- Baptismal Vocation
 - “care for others and the world God made and work for justice and peace.” p. 19
- Holy Yearning
 - “Faith bears with it a certain healthy, relativizing dissatisfaction with earthly justice.” p. 20
 - “We know we can speak out, because God has spoken out, against the wickedness of the world.” p. 21



Wise Responses of Love

- Ministry and Compassionate Suffering
- Responsive Love in Practice
 - Hearing the Cries: *listening for “what is really happening,” open to the voices of those most affected p. 24*
 - Hospitality: *risk and obligation that binds host to the protection of the guest*
 - Accompaniment: *“walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.” p. 29*
 - Advocacy: *“Compassion leads to seeking justice in the relationships and structure of society.” p. 30*
- Burden Bearing: *“We begin to count the experience of others as our own.” p. 31*



“The practices of responsive love seeking justice means this church also must attend to public policy because human needs are addressed through systems.” p. 31

Paths to Greater Justice: *Positive Trends*

- Victims' Rights
 - 50 states with legislation establishing these rights
- Restorative Justice
 - Focus on crime as “an offense against human individuals and a community rather than against ‘the state.’ ... bring victim, offender and other members of the community ... to develop a plan to repair that harm.” p. 32
 - Often used with juvenile offenders, as a minor crime deterrent, or as a supplement to other sanctions
- Alternatives to Incarceration
 - For offenders who don't pose great danger, especially drug offenders
 - Includes: home confinement, halfway houses, residential work-release centers

Paths to Greater Justice: *Positive Trends*

- Sentencing Reform
 - Increased sentencing options for drug-related and non-violent offenders
 - Often related to economic costs
- Specialized Courts
 - Focused on drug-related and mental health problems, as well as veterans
 - Work to address underlying causes of crime and provide treatment alternatives
- Reentry Programming



Paths to Greater Justice: *Ending Overuse of Incarceration*

- Pursue Alternatives to Incarceration
 - Use of pretrial release programs for individuals awaiting trial
- Reform Sentencing Laws and Policies
 - Since the 1980's policies including mandatory minimum sentencing and habitual offender laws have lengthened sentences and limited judicial discretion in the sentencing process
 - Little deterrence, enormous personal costs, major demand for public resources
- Scrutinize National Drug Policy
 - “between 1980 and 2015, the number of federal prisoners serving time for drug offenses soared from about 5,000 to 92,000” – Pew Research, 2018

Paths to Greater Justice: *Support Needed Reform*

- Acknowledge Racial Disparities and End Discrimination
 - “Profiling — whether intentional or unintentional — stigmatizes those who are innocent of any offense. It alienates members of the public who come to view the justice system as antagonistic rather than as a safeguard to all people’s rights and property.” p. 40
- Recognize Special Needs of Youth Offenders
 - “Youth offenders should be held accountable for their wrongful actions. Anything less dishonors them and their budding capacity for moral agency. Yet, they should be held accountable in age and in developmentally appropriate ways.” p. 43
- End Prison Privatization
 - “Theologically speaking, it is the role of government to restrain evil, not that of the market.” p. 44

Paths to Greater Justice: *Support Needed Reform*

- Foster Full Reintegration of Ex-Offender: *“The dominant aim of criminal justice is restored social order.” p. 45*
- Rehabilitation, re-entry, and transitional support
 - Many enter prison with limited life skills, job histories, and education, as well as untreated addictions, yet are expected to return to their community and reintegrate seamlessly upon release
 - Re-entry support can begin long before release, with needs identified at sentencing and addressed during incarceration, leading to heightened success
 - Mentoring upon release

Paths to Greater Justice: *Support Needed Reform*

- Collateral sanctions
 - Defined through legislation; restrict the right to vote, restricted access to public housing, ineligibility for public assistance and educational loans, and barriers to employment for their entire lives
 - Reflect a more punitive outlook and “tough-on-crime” strategy – at little cost to taxpayers and remain largely invisible to the public
 - “The majority of invisible punishments, however, do not fit the criterion of necessity, and therefore are unjust.” p. 47



Some Resolutions

- “To call upon members of this church ... to share the gospel of God’s love in Jesus Christ as they hear the cries, offer hospitality, accompany and advocate on behalf of those whose lives are caught up in or committed in service to the criminal justice system” p. 52
- Encourage congregations to become sites of “ministry and action for the incarcerated and their families,” with particular attention to re-entry and hiring practices
- Request creation and maintenance of a resource database focused on activities/models/training modules “that support ministry to people and action toward reform of the criminal justice system” p. 52
- Development of liturgical resources, such as services and prayers, for those involved in the criminal justice system – victims, their families, the incarcerated, and those employed by the system

Sources/Links

- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Talking_Together_Social.pdf
- <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>
- <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages>
- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Policies_and_Procedures.pdf
- <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/09/church-society-exploring-elca-social-statements/>
- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf
- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Death_PenaltySS.pdf
- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf
- https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/racial_sexual_violence_pyramid.pdf
- <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexuality>
- <https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf>
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- <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/7759>
- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Criminal_JusticeSS.pdf?