

# Called into the World:

Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements



LUTHERAN  
OFFICE  
FOR PUBLIC  
POLICY  
*in Wisconsin*



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

# Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

## Introduction

What can we say as a public church centered in Jesus Christ? What do we value as a denomination? A great place to begin when addressing these questions is with our ELCA Social Statements, based on scripture and Lutheran teachings. The process for writing the statements involve reflection, prayer, dialogue with experts and theologians, and input from every ELCA congregation that chooses to respond. As a result, we have some wonderful writings about how we as church body speak to contemporary challenges and suffering in our society. However, many people are not very aware of our social statements.

Consider leaving space for participants to express any struggles they may have with any of the social statements. Not everyone has always agreed with all aspect of particular social statements. We are part of a tradition of dynamic confessionalism, continually reflecting on how the Word engages us in our present contexts. With the grace of God, we find room for tensions in disagreements while exercising a relevant public voice as a church.

Thanks to former and current advisory council members of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (LOPPW), we are able to offer you an opportunity to engage with the social statements as a devotional. You could, for example, use this booklet for devotions at council meetings or for committee meetings. You might gather a group together specifically to study the social statements, pray, and create dialogue about how your church speaks to injustice in response to the abundant grace in our lives. The booklet could also be used when envisioning new directions your congregation might take. If you have other ideas, please let us know.

Thank you to our advisory council who created this booklet and to all who take time with it. Blessings upon you and your ministries.

Pastor Cindy Crane

LOPPW Director

Like us on [Facebook](#)

Find other resources at [www.loppw.org](http://www.loppw.org)

Phone 608-270-0201 E-mail [cindyc@loppw.org](mailto:cindyc@loppw.org)



The Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin is an ELCA advocacy ministry supported by ELCA World Hunger and the six synods with congregations in Wisconsin.

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

### Social Statement on *Our Calling in Education*

To find the full text of the Social Statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

#### Scripture:

Read Genesis 1:26-28. The Creator gives us responsibility for the life and education of new generations and for making the earth a fitting home for human beings and other creatures.

#### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

This social statement addresses this question: What does God have to do with education?

- Education, as understood in this social statement, refers in a broad sense to learning, teaching, and knowing as a dimension of human life. It is a lifelong activity that permeates all that we do. In a narrower sense, education refers to intentional activity in which we engage one another in learning.
- Education depends on and should reflect who people are as creatures of God. Humanity is one, and all are of equal worth before God. Education is always to respect the dignity we receive in being created in “the image of God”.
- The ELCA lives its calling in education today in a world that is increasingly interconnected and in a society that is becoming more pluralistic. Contemporary culture brings new marvels yet also conveys messages that hinder learning and clash with the Church’s beliefs. Science and technology continuously reshape our world, bringing new benefits as well as new dangers and creating new moral dilemmas and theological challenges.
- We pledge to sustain, renew, and where need be, reform our calling in education for the time and place so that we will be a stronger, livelier, and more faithful teaching and learning church. A teaching and learning church invites the baptized of all ages – from infants to older adults – into a continuous discipline of learning and faith formation.
- The education of young people is a shared responsibility among parents, schools, religious bodies, and community.

#### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. Does our congregation have a vibrant educational program for ALL ages of learners? What are we and our congregation doing to promote education within our church setting?
3. What resources does our congregation use in its educational ministry? Are we using the ELCA social statements as guidelines in that ministry?
4. Realizing that new forms of communicating information are available, how is our congregation using that technology in its educational ministry? Are we discerning users of that technology? Why or why not?

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

### Prayer:

Gracious God, we are grateful that you have created us with ability to learn, teach and know. We pray that the Holy Spirit will sustain, renew, and transform us as we live our calling in education in this church and society with its many amazing opportunities and daunting challenges. In Jesus' name, Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Social Statement on *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

"The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are His."  
(Psalm 24:1)

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

Christian concern for the environment is shaped by the Word of God spoken in creation, the love of God hanging on a cross, the breath of God daily renewing the face of the earth.

Vision: Scripture witnesses to God as creator of the earth and all that dwells therein (Psalm 24:1)... Humanity is intimately related to the rest of creation. We, like other creatures, are formed from the earth (Genesis 2:7, 9, 19)... Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole creation. Made in the image of God we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth. God's command to have dominion and subdue the earth is not a license to dominate and exploit... Human dominion, a special responsibility, should reflect God's way of ruling as a shepherd king who takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7)... According to Genesis 2:15, our role within creation is to serve and to keep God's garden, the earth.

Urgency: Alienated from God and from creation, and driven to make a name for ourselves, we become captives to demonic powers and unjust institutions. In our captivity, we treat the earth as a boundless warehouse and allow the powerful to exploit its bounties to their own ends (Amos:5: 6-15). Our sin and captivity lie at the roots of the current crisis... The idea of the earth as a boundless warehouse has proven both false and dangerous. Damage to the environment eventually will affect most people through increased conflict over scarce resources, decline in food security, and greater vulnerability to disease.

Hope: By the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God frees us from our sin and captivity, and empowers us to be loving servants to creation.

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

Justice: Caring, serving, keeping, loving, and living by wisdom – these translate into justice in political, economic, social, and environmental relationships. Justice in these relationships means honoring the integrity of creation, and striving for fairness within the human family.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. Each congregation is encouraged to see itself as a center for exploring scriptural and theological foundations for caring for creation. Has our congregation been involved in relevant study and discussion? Why or why not?
3. In what ways can we as a congregation bring together people of various viewpoints to discuss the importance of caring for our environment?
4. Has our congregation taken steps to advocate for sustainability in our community? Can we consider working cooperatively with other congregations, organizations, businesses etc. to find ways to care for our environment?

### Prayer:

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

\*\*\*\*\*

## Social Statement on *The Death Penalty*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

Those who support the use of the death penalty often do so on the basis of Scripture, especially “you shall give life for life” (Exodus 21:23b) and “let every person be subject to the governing authorities...for the authority does not bear the sword in vain” (Romans 13:1-7; cf., 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Those who oppose the death penalty often do so on the basis of Scripture, arguing that Jesus in His teaching abolished the death penalty in the Law, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” (Matthew 5:38-39), and by example “When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her’.” (John 8:7).

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

The human community is saddened by violence, and angered by the injustice involved. We want to hold accountable those who violate life, who violate society. Our sadness and anger,

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

however, make us vulnerable to feelings of revenge. Our frustration with the complex problems contributing to violence may make us long for simple solutions.

On the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions we hold that, through the divine activity of the Law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world. God works through the state and other structures of society Necessary for life in the present age.

It is because of this church's ministry with and to people affected by violent crime that we oppose the death penalty. Executions focus on the convicted murderer, providing very little for the victim's family or anyone else whose life has been touched by the crime. Capital punishment focuses on retribution, sometimes reflecting a spirit of vengeance. Executions do not restore broken society and can actually work counter to restoration.

It is because of this church's commitment to justice that we oppose the death penalty. Lutheran Christians have called for an assault on the root causes of violent crime, an assault in which executions are no substitute.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What are the root causes of violent crime and how do we address them?
3. How is the criminal justice system connected to other areas of concern to the church such as racism, poverty, abuse, and chemical dependency?
4. Does Capital punishment act as a deterrent?

### Prayer:

Merciful God, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for those impacted by the death penalty.

We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

We pray for those on death row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion.

We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land.

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

Compassionate God, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and to build a society that truly chooses life in all situations. We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Social Statement on *For Peace in God's World*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

#### Scripture:

Choose from these texts: Romans15:33; 16:20; 1Corinthians14:33; 2Corinthians13:11; Philippians4:9; 1Thessalonians5:23; 2Thessalonians3:16; Hebrews13:20; Colossians1:15-20; Philippians2:10-11; Romans8:19-25; 1Corinthians15:23-25.

#### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

Most importantly, this statement recalls that the basis of the Church's peace-calling is in God's final peace, the peace of God's eternal reign. That calling is to proclaim the Gospel of God's final peace and to work for earthly peace. This statement understands earthly peace to mean relationships among and within nations that are just, harmonious, and free from war.

This reconciling love of enemy discloses how deeply peace is rooted in who God is. The cross of Christ enacts God's resolve for peace once-for-all.

By equipping the faithful to act for peace in all their communities, the Church contributes to earthly peace. In recalling our identity in baptism, in gathering in peace around the Lord's Table, in telling the biblical narrative, in teaching faith, hope, and love, the Church provides the basics of peacemaking for all of life.

As a reconciling presence, the Church creates bonds among different peoples, whether local or distant. It has special opportunities to bring conflicting parties together and to keep tenuous lines of communication open during times of crisis and war. The Church serves reconciliation by countering religious movements—including ones claiming to be Christian that preach and practice hate and violence, by challenging stereotypes of "the enemy," and by encouraging imaginative solutions to conflicts.

In the cross we recognize that forgiveness, reconciliation, and love of enemy are essential to our efforts to build earthly peace.

#### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What role do you understand the church to have in working toward a peaceful world?
3. Should or will the increasingly connected world make peace more attainable?

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

4. When is the church a “disturbing presence.” As citizens what responsibility do we have at certain times to resist war and violence?
5. How do you understand the “just/unjust war” principles the ELCA draws from?

**Prayer** adapted from the Prayer of St. Francis: Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Social Statement on *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture***

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

#### **Scripture:**

Read Ephesians 2:14. The Church confesses Christ, who has broken down the dividing wall. The Church looks toward the freedom of the reign of God, announced by and embodied in Jesus. But Christians live between the “now” of the reign of God and the “not yet” of its fulfillment. Read 1 John 1:8. Trusting the promise of freedom, we can face the fact that each of us is captive, each of us is in bondage to sin.

#### **Social Statement Tidbits** (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

- Racism — a mix of power, privilege and prejudice — is sin, a violation of God’s intention for humanity.
- The ELCA is in mission in a multicultural society and has made commitments to welcome cultural diversity.
- Those with access to opportunities, power and institutions remain separate from those without such access, whose cultures often have been ridiculed and reviled, or destroyed. The ELCA expects our leadership to name the sin of racism and lead us in our repentance.
- Participation in public life is essential to doing justice. The ELCA encourages public witness and insists on a public forum accessible to everyone.
- The ELCA received from its predecessor church bodies a solid foundation for advocacy. Advocacy will look for change and fair distribution of the social costs of correcting past wrongs. Advocacy will work for respect of cultures and oppose language-based discrimination.



## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

- The ELCA will support legislation that guarantees to all individuals equally: civil rights; access to quality education, health care, and nutrition; opportunity for employment with fair compensation; opportunity for business ownership; access to legal, banking, and insurance services; the right to purchase housing in any place; and access to public transportation.
- The ELCA will promote international respect for human rights, and support the international movement to eliminate discrimination.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. When have you been encouraged or inspired by movements that call attention to discrimination (eg. Civil rights movement, Black Lives Matter)? When have movements been troubling or difficult to receive? When reflecting consider movements of groups that didn't necessarily have titles.
3. How could the government be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?
4. How could the church be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?
5. How could you be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?

### Prayer:

Gracious God, you are the God of All Creation. Help us to be good neighbors and joyful advocates for all people, of all backgrounds. You love all that you have made. Help us to do the same. Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Social Statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answered, “‘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 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” (Matthew 22:36–40).

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

This social statement addresses the question: how do we understand human sexuality within the context of Jesus' invitation to love God and love our neighbor (Romans 13:9–10; Galatians 5:14)?

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

No relationships or social structures can thrive in the absence of trust. Two such foundational social structures are marriage and the family. Lutherans believe that God works through these structures for the good of society.

The statement attempts to lay a Lutheran foundation for thinking about love of God and neighbor, honoring creation and the body, the gift of family as a vocation and experience of God's grace, and the necessity to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation.

When it comes to the question of same-gender relationships, the statement acknowledges that several (four, in particular) convictions exist among the people of the ELCA; each of these convictions are informed by biblical and theological reflection; and while we are not of one mind, we commit ourselves to honoring the conscience-bound convictions of others. As such, different congregations will make different choices regarding how to relate to people in same-gender relationships with whom they are in ministry – and we do not expect all congregations to have the same practices and policies in this regard.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What issues of sexuality and family are of most concern to you? What does it mean to speak about those issues as a person of faith?
3. What can and/or should the church be doing to help people of all ages have healthy, life-giving intimate/sexual lives that honor God and neighbor?
4. When have you been challenged by loving someone with whom you fundamentally disagree on an issue that is important to you? How can you honor the “bound conscience” of that person while also holding onto your own convictions?

### Prayer:

Gracious God, you came among us – as one of us – to show us the way to abundant life. Help us to confront the things that take life away from us and our neighbors. Help us to celebrate the gifts you have given that lead us into life. Help us to celebrate family and relationship, while we also walk with those for whom love is a stranger. Help us to love one another, even and especially when we disagree. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Social Statement on *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”

Matthew 6:24c “You cannot serve God and wealth.”

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

Matthew 6:11 "Give us this day our daily bread."

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

- Christian vocation is our freedom, through the gospel, to serve others through our earthly responsibilities such as family, work and community life. "Livelihood" refers to our economic support system. The relationships and structures that support livelihood teach important virtues. As a church the ELCA commits to and urges its members to support and encourage the living out of daily callings in order to serve the neighbor (including the wider society) while trusting in God's providential care.
- "Sufficiency" means being able to meet basic needs. God created a world that has enough for all, but it needs to be shared and distributed justly in order to be enough for all. Huge disparities in wealth threaten the integrity of the human community. Property does not ultimately belong to us under a biblical understanding of stewardship. The ELCA commits to providing for people in need and calls for the government to provide for people in need or who are unable to provide for their livelihood through employment.
- Consumerism causes us to confuse what we want with what we need. Possessions and wealth can become our gods. The gulf between the pay of top corporate officers and average workers is scandalous. Transnational corporations, wielding great economic power, should be held accountable for the sake of all.
- "Sustainability" is the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term. We are moved by Scripture to focus on the long term and respect the integrity and limits of creation. Humans have treated the earth as something to be used rather than the finite, fragile ecological system upon which life depends. We confess our mistreatment of the environment, and believe that economic processes should respect environmental limits.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What issues of economic justice are of the most concern to you? What does it mean to speak about those issues as a person of faith?
3. Have you or someone you care about had economic struggles? How does this affect your thoughts on economic justice?
4. How does the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," shape your understanding of personal and societal economic life?
5. How does the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us today our daily bread," shape your understanding of personal and societal economic life?

**Prayer:** Sing or pray verses 1-2 "We Give Thee but Thine Own" #410 LBW, #686 ELW

## Social Statement on Abortion

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

Human beings, created in God's image as male and female (Genesis 1:27-28), are persons of intrinsic value and dignity. All of life is a mysterious, awesome gift of God. Biblical passages express the God-given mystery of creation (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 40:26ff; Luke 1:41; Acts 17:24-25). We are to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

"The topic of abortion evokes strong and varied convictions about the social order, the roles of women and men, human life and human responsibility, freedom and limits, sexual morality, and the significance of children in our lives. It involves powerful feelings that are based on different life experiences and interpretations of Christian faith and life in the world. If we are to take our differences seriously, we must learn how to talk about them in ways that do justice to our diversity."

- Abortion as a last resort. As a church we seek to reduce the need to turn to abortion as the answer to unintended pregnancies.
- We deplore the circumstances that lead a woman to consider abortion as the best option available to her.
- As a community of faith we seek to live out our support for life in all its dimensions. We are committed to supporting those who face problematic pregnancies...
- Our ministry of hospitality to all people...
- Contraceptives and sex education
- Church challenges the life-degrading attitudes that permeate the prevailing culture and may contribute to the high incidence of abortion
- Compassionate communities who are aware of moral complexity of unintended pregnancy
- Utilize the professional expertise of the church's social ministry organizations.
- An abortion is morally responsible in those cases in which continuation of a pregnancy presents a clear threat to the physical life of the woman. Rape. Incest. Fetal abnormality, severe suffering, development
- Related issues: prevent unintended pregnancies, support life after birth, abortion regulation

"The church's role in society begins long before and extends far beyond legislative regulation. It seeks to shape attitudes and values that affirm people in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Its pastoral care, compassionate outreach, and life-sustaining assistance are crucial in supporting those who bear children, as well as those who

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

choose not to do so. Through these and other means the people of God seek to be truly supportive of life.”

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. How do we show hospitality to all people in their circumstances?
3. How do we reduce the circumstances that lead a woman to turn to abortion?
4. As a community of faith, how do we seek to live out our support for life in all its dimensions?
5. What are the various reasons that lead a woman to consider abortion?
6. What, how, when do we teach our children?

### Prayer:

Compassionate God, help us understand how to best show hospitality to all people in their needs. Help us affirm people in their circumstances. Help us to respect each other even when we disagree. Lead us in how to instruct our children. We pray for women and girls facing difficult decisions, men who harm them, families affected by decisions, and for your church to give pastoral care, compassionate outreach, and assistance to mothers whatever their choice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Social Statement on *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8: 1, 3-9).

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

Genetic science includes a range of disciplines that deal with biologically based characteristics and their inheritance. The developments stemming from genetic science and its applications illustrate the abundant gifts of God's creation. Breakthrough discoveries and cutting-edge

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

technologies evoke a sense of awe and provide insights into the human place within the web of creation. They unlock unprecedented power to diagnose and cure diseases and to address agricultural and environmental problems. These developments also exemplify how contemporary human knowledge and technology are creating a different relationship between human power and life on this planet.

The ELCA believes in one God, who created in the beginning, who creates now and in whom all things, visible and invisible, hold together (Colossians 1:3–20). We confess that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will redeem all that has been, is and will be—including human choices involving genetic knowledge and its application. The ELCA believes that this gracious God also endows human beings with insight and reasoning and calls human beings to help order and shape, nurture and promote the creation so that it may continue to flourish. This church recognizes that contemporary power, such as that arising from genetic science, presents human beings with choices and responsibilities for which human beings are accountable to God. This power obligates us to a greater level of accountability, one that will be measured best by whether and how the whole creation continues to flourish.

Earthly life is morally and spiritually ambiguous. Good and bad, right and wrong, sin and redemption are always mixed together. As redeemed and yet sinful people in Christ, we must speak and act boldly and yet in humility. Our Christian confidence to do so lies in the certainty of God's promise to be present and ultimately to bring fulfillment to this good creation.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. How has the word "dominion" used here in Psalm 8 and also in Genesis chapter one been misinterpreted?
3. God has given human kind great responsibility as caretakers of creation. How have we misused this responsibility?
4. Should we "cure" or "treat" genetic inborn disorders or appreciate the uniqueness of those who are different because of a genetic abnormality?
5. What are the limits of genetic "tinkering" with creation?

### Prayer:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! We are fearfully and wonderfully made to be in relationship with you and with all creation. Give us humble spirits as we endeavor to care for your creation and each other. Help us to appreciate and acknowledge the wonder and creativity in your world. Help us to be responsible stewards of all that you create and provide as we cherish this world you have given us. Amen

Social Statement on *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

**Scripture:**

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream” (Amos 5:24). This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9).

**Social Statement Tidbits** (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

- The ELCA is prompted to speak and to act because so many cries of suffering and despair emerge from the criminal justice system — from victims, the incarcerated, their families, communities, those wrongly convicted, they who work in the system — and have not been heard.
- Drawing from Holy Scripture, this church holds up a vision of God's justice that is wondrously richer and deeper than human imitations and yet is a mirror in which justice in this world, God's world, must always be assessed.
- In assessing the current system, the ELCA gives thanks for its principles and orientation toward justice. This church recognizes many in the system who serve their professional vocations with competent and humane performance. Yet, this statement recognizes serious deficiencies. An underlying punitive mindset, budgetary constraints and persistent inequalities based on race and class frequently challenge its basic principles and impose significant costs on all involved in the system, and on society as a whole.

One approach to looking at the Church and Criminal Justice is through confession:

- We as a church are called to confess that the church and its members have fallen short in responding to the growing problems of the justice system. We ourselves sometimes have committed crimes. Often we have been negligent or allowed fear or bias to dictate responses to crime. Often we have allowed the cries of those harmed or those who work in the system to go unheard. Often we have been complacent as the burdens of crime and the criminal justice system are borne unfairly, especially by people of color or people living in poverty.
- In confessing complicity in injustice, this church invokes both the judgment and the wise guidance of God. We turn to God for counsel on how we might minister better and more mercifully to those harmed by injustice. We ask God's aid in opening our hearts to the cries of our neighbors, that their faces and voices might show us whom we must love, if we say we love God (1 John 4:18-21). We pray for guidance to speak more prophetically and to strive more responsibly toward earthly justice.

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What issues of criminal justice are of the most concern to you? What does it mean to speak about those issues as a person of faith?
2. When/how have you been involved in the criminal justice system? How does that affect your thoughts on the workings of the system?
3. What victims do we have a hard time showing compassion too? What offenders do we have a hard time showing compassion too?

### 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. Remember 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

\*\*\*\*\*

### Social Statement on *Caring for Health, A Shared Endeavor*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#).

### Scripture:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound<sup>1</sup> and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Thessalonians 5:23) In Christ, we are blessed "wholly". This gift of wholeness is seen as restoration, mentally, physically and spiritually. This is a gift intended for all.

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

- Health, A Shared Endeavor, illuminates the understanding that health, a gift, enables us to participate in serving God and neighbor. As individuals we are called to be good stewards of this gift of health.
- Yet, individuals cannot be healthy by themselves. Health and health care depend upon other people and upon conditions and actions taken in the wider community. Caring for the gift of health is indeed a shared endeavor.
- We are reminded that we live in a relationship with our loving God who seeks to make us whole through sharing God's relational love in community, where no one is excluded. Such interdependence contrasts with the common message of individualism often



## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

found in our society. As Christians we are to participate in Christ's love by giving ourselves for others.

- It follows then that "Although health care goods and services may be bought and sold, health care is above all an activity of caring that flows out of relationships of mutual responsibility, concern and trust... and that cannot be reduced to a commodity." (p6) and "At a minimum each person should have ready access to basic health care services
- that include preventive, acute and chronic physical and mental health care at an affordable cost". (p13).
- As people of Christ, we recognize that we indeed are finite and vulnerable. However, we understand that there is more. We see that in focusing only on a "cure" we will miss the deeper dimension of healing and being made "whole", of being restored to God and life within a community of relationships.
- Congregations are seen as being in the "health care business" because they are centered in word and sacrament ministry which offers "salvation" (the Latin word for healing or wholeness.)
- At the same time, we recognize that there are limits to health care. This social statement also seeks to set ethical guidance for individuals and families.
- The vision of the shared endeavor of wholeness, with God and one another, calls us to be active participants in helping create and maintain a just and effective health care system for all.

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What does it mean to be a steward of our own well-being?
3. When making decisions regarding our and one another's "wholeness", what might our fellowship time look like? Our worship? Our social ministry?
4. If health care is an interdependent shared endeavor, what role does "caring for creation" play in building whole and healthier communities? What might a "whole and healthy" community look like?
5. Martin Luther stated that every ruler's coat of arms should have a loaf of bread emblazoned on it because he believed it the responsibility of rulers to see that their subjects were provided for. What is our role as Lutherans and citizens in our form of government?

### Prayer:

Healing God, through your Word, we witness your son's coming into our world. We witness Jesus as a vulnerable child dependent on others. We see his healing of the sick and his restoring outcasts to community as signs of your kingdom come among us. As we remember Christ's suffering, his death and his glorious resurrection, we see your promise that through suffering and death we also will be made whole. We ask that your Holy Spirit may continue to guide us into the path of healing for us and our world. We pray that our communities be blessed with wholeness and that our leaders be guided to enact faithful policies. May our lives be filled with gratitude as we live in the freedom of your amazing gift of salvation, of wholeness, of being blessed with your relational love. Amen

## Social Statement on *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*

To find the full text of the social statement, go [here](#).

A summary is available [here](#) .

### Scripture:

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

### Social Statement Tidbits (Ask people to notice a line or section that strikes them):

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is called to be a part of the ecumenical Church of Jesus Christ in the context in which God has placed it—a diverse, divided, and threatened global society on a beautiful, fragile planet. In faithfulness to its calling, this church exists within the processes and structures of contemporary society.
- This social statement lays out several affirmations we have made together as a church:
  - The Gospel and the Church – “The witness of this church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and for the Gospel.”
  - The Church Universal – “This church builds upon a legacy of more than three-hundred years of Lutheran presence in the United States and the Caribbean and affirms its cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity as vital to its identity.”
  - The Church “In” But Not “From” the World- “The Gospel does not take the Church out of the world but instead calls it to affirm and to enter more deeply into the world.”
  - The Church’s Responsibility in Society – “Through the divine activity of the Law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world.”
  - The Baptismal Vocation of Christians – “The example of Jesus invites Christians to see people near and far away, people of all races, classes and cultures, friends and strangers, allies and enemies as their ‘neighbor’.”
  - A Community of Moral Deliberation – “To act justly and effectively, this church needs to analyze social and environmental issues critically and to probe the reasons why the situation is as it is.”
- The Social Statement also lays out commitments of the church:
  - Sustaining Vocation
  - Witnessing as an Institution
  - Deliberating on Social Questions

## Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements

### Questions:

1. Which line or lines stood out to you?
2. What does it mean to you and to your congregation to be a part of a church that recognizes a strong calling to advocate for justice, work for peace, and care for the earth?
3. In what ways are you actively living out your vocation of faith active in love in your community; in your state; nationally? Are you and others being supported by your congregation in your vocation?
4. How can you challenge yourself and your congregation to more deeply engage as the church in our society to defend human dignity, to stand with poor and powerless people, to advocate justice, to work for peace, and to care for the earth?

**Prayer:** Creator God, you made us all in your image and gave us great responsibility in caring for each other and for our world. Be with us as we discern our vocation as individuals and as a church, to understand how we can best serve your creation. Give us strength to see your world with clarity, to work diligently to hold ourselves and others accountable, and to be active, engaged, and outspoken participants in our family, our church, and our government. Amen.