



## Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns

*The 1997 Churchwide Assembly acted in August 1997 to affirm the adoption by the Church Council of this document, as a revision of the former document, “Social Statements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Principles and Procedures,” which was adopted by the first Churchwide Assembly on August 28, 1989; and to authorize the Church Council to make appropriate adjustments in these policies and procedures as further experience would indicate. This version was approved by the Church Council at its April 2011 meeting.*

Faithful participation in society is integral and vital to the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). As individual members and as a corporate body this church lives out the Christian faith in encounter with the concerns that shape life in God’s creation. Social statements, messages, social policy resolutions, and studies of social issues are important means by which this church carries out its participation in society. This document is meant to clarify, order, and strengthen their role in the life and mission of this church. It revises an earlier document with the same name in order to bring these policies and procedures into accord with the changes in the governance structure of the churchwide organization enacted by the Church Council at its October 8, 2010, and November 12–14, 2010, meetings.<sup>1</sup>

This document presents four distinct yet interrelated spheres of activity that seek to form in this church new partnerships, practices, and capacities for discerning and doing God’s will in the world. These four spheres are:

- 1) Equipping and Nurturing Members;
- 2) Encouraging Learning and Moral Discourse;
- 3) Developing and Enacting Social Policy; and
- 4) Interpreting and Applying Social Policy.

While each sphere of activity contains distinct initiatives, each sphere supports and relates to the others. The following sets forth this church’s bases for addressing social concerns, describes the four spheres of activity, and outlines the procedures for each sphere.

### **Called to Witness in Society**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America addresses social concerns in witness to God’s just and loving intention for all of creation. This church participates in society in grateful response to God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. Through faith in the Gospel the Church is freed to love the neighbor in this world, as it hopes and prays for “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). While this world is corrupted by sin, it also is created by the Triune God, who promises it fullness and continues to sustain it. In this world the Church is called to live its faith, love, and hope by caring for and transforming the structures of society, working for justice, and preserving the earth. For “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

The constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America makes clear the commitment of this church to listen to, deliberate with, and address its members and the broader society on social concerns:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America confesses the Gospel to be “the power of God to create and sustain the church for God’s mission in the world” (ELCA 2.07.).

To participate in God’s mission, this church shall:

Serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs... (ELCA 4.02.c.).

Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world (ELCA 4.02.e.).

To fulfill these purposes, this church shall:

Encourage and equip all members to worship, learn, serve, and witness; to fulfill their calling to serve God in the world; and to be stewards of the earth, their lives, and the Gospel (ELCA 4.03.b.).

Lift its voice in concord and work in concert with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged (ELCA 4.03.g.).

Study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in the world (ELCA 4.03.l.).

Work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction (ELCA 4.03.n.).

Social statements and other resources on social concerns build on the rich legacy of the church bodies that united to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As a confessional church with a historical sense, this church continues to look to the social statements of The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America for guidance, while it develops its own social statements and further deliberates on social concerns.<sup>2</sup>

These historical documents, too, summon this church to a coherent, responsible, and prophetic public witness. In its first social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirmed anew its calling to witness in society and made the following basic commitments:

- “to sustain and support its members in their baptismal vocation to serve God and neighbor in daily life” (page 6);
- “to serve God and neighbor in its life and work as an institution” (page 7); and
- “to foster moral deliberation on social questions” (page 7).

### **Constitutional Directives**

The activity of the four spheres described in this document shall be consistent with the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

The constitution assigns primary responsibility for this church’s preparation and coordination of resources on social concerns to the churchwide organization, particularly to the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This task is to be carried out in a spirit of interdependence, partnership, and cooperation with congregations, synods, institutions, and agencies, as well as with other churchwide units.

The congregations, synods, and churchwide organization of this church are interdependent partners sharing responsibly in God’s mission. In an interdependent relationship primary responsibility for particular functions will vary between the partners (ELCA 5.01.c.).

This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part . . . lives in a partnership relationship with the others (ELCA 8.11.).

This church shall seek to meet human needs through encouragement of its people to individual and corporation action, and through establishing, developing, recognizing, and supporting institutions and agencies that minister to people in their spiritual and temporal needs (ELCA 8.33).

In fulfillment of the purposes of this church, the churchwide organization shall:

Provide resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve, and witness in their ministry in daily life (ELCA 11.21.b.).

Witness to the Word of God in Christ by united efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, responding to human need, caring for the sick and suffering, working for justice and peace, and providing guidance to members on social matters (ELCA 11.21.d.).

Develop and administer policies for this church’s relationship to social ministry organizations and cooperate with public and private agencies that enhance human dignity and justice (ELCA 11.21.i.).

Determine and implement policy for this church’s relationship to governments (ELCA 11.21.j.).

The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with the appropriate churchwide unit(s), shall serve “the Church’s theological work by promoting, coordinating, and facilitating theological discernment of the Church’s message and its theological foundations in collaboration with all who share in the responsibilities to be teachers of the faith in the Church...” (ELCA 15.12.G10).

The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit shall use this church’s foundational and theological statements and messages “...in creating coalitions and networks to promote justice and peace” and in “facilitating the engagement of this church in advocacy” (ELCA 16.12.A10).

As a partner in addressing social concerns, each synod shall:

Plan for the mission of this church in the synod, initiating and developing policy, and implementing programs, consistent with churchwide policy, including: . . .

- 6) provision for resources for congregational life;
- 7) assistance to the members of its congregations in carrying out their ministries in the world; and
- 8) interpretation of social statements in a manner consistent with the interpretation given by the churchwide unit which assisted in the development of the statement, and suggestion of social study issues (ELCA 10.21.e.).

Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society (ELCA 10.21.o.).

### **Sphere One: Equipping and Nurturing Members**

#### **Description**

The first sphere of activity is that of equipping and nurturing members of this church for their calling in the world. All expressions and ministries of this church participate in this ongoing task of formation for vocation. Attention to the personal and communal sources of social witness and policy development is meant to build up this church’s capacity to engage in personal and corporate deliberation and action. This sphere of activity calls for the development of resources—in the broad sense of people, networks, and materials—to assist this church to be a community of moral deliberation and a church faithfully active in society.

This sphere of activity enables members of this church to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ in the world today. It relies and expands upon the catechetical work of this church. It attends to foundational and formative dimensions of the Christian moral life, such as the meaning of discipleship, methods of moral deliberation and discernment, the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and the place of experience and reason in ethical decision-making. Developing capacities in these areas requires deepening knowledge of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. It also requires certain attitudes, values, behaviors, and skills that enable ELCA members to use Scripture and tradition in social witness and policy development. Clearly, this equipping and nurturing is a long-term task that calls for the regular development of material for widespread use throughout this church. This church seeks creative new resources—particularly teachers and methods of learning—that enjoy a permanent place in the lives of members and congregations and help create a culture of formation for vocation.

#### **Procedures**

1. The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in collaboration with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the appropriate churchwide unit(s), shall oversee this sphere of activity.
2. The program committee of this unit shall meet to evaluate this church’s needs and opportunities and to envision whether there should be new or expanded projects to help create a culture of formation for vocation. As appropriate, this unit shall invite other churchwide units and individuals to participate in these consultations.
3. In light of a consultation’s recommendations, this unit may initiate or propose projects in this sphere of activity. They will report to the Church Council the financial implications of their proposed projects.

### **Sphere Two: Encouraging Learning and Moral Discourse**

#### **Description**

The second sphere of activity is that of encouraging learning and moral discourse among members of this church around social concerns of the times. This church’s moral deliberation does not always intend or result in Churchwide Assembly action. Therefore, this sphere of activity promotes open-ended deliberation on specific contemporary social concerns without the pressure of legislative decision or community consensus. Further, such routine practices of moral

reflection and deliberation in congregations, homes, social ministry organizations, and other settings serve those occasions where this church discerns a need to draw corporate normative conclusions. Insofar as this activity provides common content and experience for this church's intention to be a community of moral deliberation, it often precedes activity in sphere three and thereby also offers a basis for considered selection of those concerns that should be subject to legislative decision.

Churchwide activity in this sphere primarily involves the development of resources that aim to encompass this church's analysis of particular social concerns within the framework of basic Christian theology and morality. This sphere of activity includes the production of messages, study documents, and teaching materials, as well as the development of models and the preparation of resource people for congregational deliberation. Approaches to study vary from issue to issue and group to group, but all approaches aim to encourage an inclusive, in-depth process of learning and deliberation about a consequential social concern. This sphere lends itself particularly well to periodic conversation experiences, such as listening posts, continuing education events, and conferences on specific social concerns.

Messages are a particular means to encourage learning and moral discourse. They also draw out the implications of this church's social policy (sphere four). Messages rely upon this church's social statements and social policy resolutions and are adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (see the Appendix).

Resources in this sphere of activity should be regularly under development for widespread use throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

### **Procedures**

1. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with the appropriate churchwide unit(s), shall be responsible for churchwide activities in this sphere of activity. It shall carry out its responsibility in accordance with the principle of interdependence.
2. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in order to assist members of this church in their study of social concerns, shall propose the study of selected topics and the development of relevant resources (people, networks, materials) and study material. In doing so, it shall assemble for most projects a team of people, often including individuals from congregations, synods, ELCA institutions, and agencies of this church in accord with this church's principles of representation. In selecting topics and developing resources, the office shall draw upon the wealth of expertise and interest in social concerns within this church and shall base its decisions upon ongoing and wide-ranging consultation with relevant members and groups throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including the Conference of Bishops.
3. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall report its activities in this sphere to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly and shall promote its work throughout this church.

### **Sphere Three: Developing and Enacting Social Policy**

#### **Description**

The third sphere of activity is that of lifting this church's voice in witness to social concerns through developing and enacting social policy. Here this church's moral deliberation aims at corporate conclusions. This sphere of activity engages Lutheran theology with broad social concerns as well as specific issues through documents that set forth this church's normative understandings and policy on individual and corporate Christian responsibility in the world. Such documents are social statements and social policy resolutions, that is, actions of the Churchwide Assembly or Church Council on matters of social concern.

Social statements are major documents addressing significant social issues. Typically, they provide an analysis and interpretation of an issue, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives related to it, and offer guidance for the corporate Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its individual members. Social statements are documents of the highest quality. They vary in scope, length, frequency, and forms of moral discourse, according to the needs of their subject matter. In all cases, social statements are the product of extensive and inclusive deliberation within this church, a process that is an integral part of their educational purpose. Because of the considerable resources and care that this church invests in them, and because of the participatory process used in their development, social statements are the most authoritative form of social policy and are adopted only by the Churchwide Assembly.

## **Guiding Perspectives for Social Statements**

The perspectives outlined below are intended to help guide this church's understanding, development, consideration, and use of social statements.

### **1. Social statements are theological documents.**

These documents arise from and address the changing circumstances of the world in light of God's living word of Law and Gospel. With the aid of contemporary experience and knowledge, they bring this church's understanding of its faith to bear on social issues. Because they view issues from the perspective of the Church's faith, social statements are clearly rooted in the biblical and confessional witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are subject again and again to the testing of whether they are faithful to Scriptures as "the authoritative source and norm of [this church's] proclamation, faith, and life" (ELCA 2.03.) and to its creeds and confessions (ELCA 2.04., 2.05., and 2.06.). They themselves are not new creeds or confessions.

### **2. Social statements are teaching documents.**

In their preparation, content, and use, these documents bring together the realities of the world, the experience of Christians living their vocation, and the convictions of faith. Social statements give voice to the prophetic mandate of this church, its calling to care for God's world, and its commitment to reason together on social concerns. In so doing, they inform, guide, and challenge this church and its members. They are intended "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

Church members are called upon to give social statements serious consideration as they form their own judgments. In the use of social statements as teaching documents, their authority is persuasive, not coercive. Their teaching function builds upon and seeks to nurture the freedom of Christians to decide and act responsibly. Social statements help shape the conscience of Christians by appealing to their faith, moral convictions, and reason. The respect they evoke comes from the truth and wisdom they embody, which has stood the testing of various forums within this church and to which testing they always continue to be subject. Their effective teaching significance is determined by the intrinsic quality of their content and by their use in this church.

### **3. Social statements involve this church in the ongoing task of theological ethics.**

In these documents, this church addresses the question: "What ought we as Christians and the church think and do about this social issue?" Social statements seek to discern God's will for today, offering insight and direction on how people should view an issue and act justly in relation to it. Their focus is most commonly on those ethical guidelines that mediate between very general moral affirmations and the detailed requirements of a particular situation.

Social statements hope to reflect the qualities of a community of forgiven sinners called to do God's will. They probe for shared convictions and the boundaries of faithful action; within this framework, they acknowledge diversity. These documents recognize the complexity of society and the power of sin as well as the responsibility of this church to speak and to act with hope and boldness. They appeal to theology, ethics, secular knowledge, history, and contemporary experience to offer coherent and plausible reasons for their judgments. As the work of a community that stands under God's judgment and grace, social statements exhibit openness to the Holy Spirit's further guidance.

Social statements are meant to foster the art of ethical reflection and discussion in congregations and other expressions of this church. They depend on a vision of the church as a community of moral deliberation in which serious communication on matters of society and faith is vital to its being. United by baptism, members are free to discuss and disagree, knowing that they are ultimately bound together in the body of Christ by the Gospel and not by their moral judgments.

### **4. Social statements result from an extensive, inclusive, and accepted process of deliberation throughout this church.**

They are shaped by careful and critical listening to this church and to society, as well as to other church bodies and ecumenical organizations, both in this country and around the world. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, through the Theological Discernment staff, works with representative and diverse groups of this church to develop social statements through careful and thorough research and study. In order to explore adequately the issue, these groups include people with needed specialized knowledge and people directly affected by the issue. Broad participation by congregations and synods, as well as by other churchwide units, is to be encouraged and facilitated in the study process. The Church

Council and the Conference of Bishops (15.31.A03.g.) provide forums for discussing social statements. Their development is guided by the constitutional mandate to “provide structures and decision-making processes for this church that foster mutuality and interdependence and that involve people in making decisions that affect them” (ELCA 4.03.o.).

#### **5. Social statements guide the institutional life of this church.**

They set forth the principles and directions that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America considers necessary to govern the internal and external practices of its social responsibility in accordance with its understanding of God’s will. They express mutual expectations and provide for mutual accountability in this church.

Social statements establish policy for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s work in the areas of advocacy and corporate social responsibility (ELCA 11.21.i. and j; ELCA 14.21.14.), enabling, limiting, and directing these activities.

Social statements include in their implementing resolutions instructions and recommendations on how their governing principles and directives are to be carried out by different parts of this church.

It is expected that ELCA-affiliated agencies and institutions will develop policies and practices consistent with the principles and directives of social statements.

Those who represent this church are expected to present the positions of the social statements as those of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This understanding recognizes their freedom to disagree with these positions.

#### **6. Social statements, intended to be used widely in the life and mission of this church, reflect awareness of the various audiences and ministries which they are to serve.**

To help stimulate consideration of social issues in congregations, their language is clear and appropriate for congregational life. They are a helpful resource for pastors, bishops, theologians, and other teachers and leaders in this church. Social statements offer individual members guidance and support for their participation in society. They address the broader society in ways fitting for public discussion of social issues. Social statements offer faithful and viable policy directives that have the support of the legislative authority of this church.

#### **Procedures for Social Statements**

The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with the appropriate churchwide unit(s), shall oversee the development and implementation of social statements in accordance with the principle of interdependence.

#### **Selection of Topics**

1. Synods may propose topics for social statements “through (a) Synod Assembly memorials to the Churchwide Assembly or (b) resolutions for referral from the Synod Assembly through the Synod Council to the Church Council and (c) Synod Council resolutions addressed to the Church Council or for referral to a unit of the churchwide organization through the Church Council’s Executive Committee” (ELCA 10.21.e.8.).
2. The Church Council shall recommend topics for social statement development to the Churchwide Assembly.
3. The Churchwide Assembly shall approve topics for social statement development.

#### **Social Statement Development**

1. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, advised by the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall oversee the study process leading to a social statement. It shall assure that:
  - a. an appropriate group is named to study the topic;
  - b. ways are found to encourage broad participation by the congregations and members of this church;
  - c. social statements are preceded by a study document or first draft specifically prepared as a step in policy deliberation and development. Decisions about preliminary documents should be made on a case-by-case basis according to the scope of concerns that the proposed social statement will involve and the extent of this church’s history with the topic. A preliminary document, with a designed format for study and response, should be available at least eighteen months before the social statement is considered by a Churchwide Assembly.
2. Synods shall receive copies of preliminary studies and drafts for review and counsel. Synods shall cooperate in the preparation of social statements by encouraging study of and response to preliminary documents by congregations, individuals, synodical committees and synodical forums or hearings.
3. The Church Council and the Conference of Bishops shall be forums for deliberation on preliminary documents.

### **Social Statement Adoption**

1. The Church Council shall review and act upon the recommendations by the Office of the Presiding Bishop (ELCA 14.21.01., 14.21.03.). The Church Council shall approve the text of proposed social statements and recommend the text to the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.12.01.). Prior to a published deadline before a meeting of the Church Council, any voting member of the council who wishes to suggest an amendment to the proposed social statement shall submit it to the chair of the Program and Services Committee. The Program and Services Committee will make a recommendation concerning the proposed amendment to the Church Council, which will act upon that recommendation.
2. Synods shall receive proposed social statements at least three months prior to the Churchwide Assembly at which they will be considered for review by voting members.
3. Only the Churchwide Assembly shall adopt ELCA social statements (ELCA 12.21.d.).
  - a. Any amendment to a proposed social statement must be submitted in writing to the secretary of this church prior to a published deadline. Voting members who submit amendments may be requested to meet with staff of Theological Discernment in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. If in the opinion of the chair of the assembly the amendments are either too voluminous or too complex for the assembly to consider expeditiously, all amendments may be referred by the chair to either the Committee of Reference and Counsel or an *ad hoc* committee appointed by the chair with the consent of the assembly for its recommendations for the consideration of the proposed social statement and the proposed amendments by the assembly. If a voting member wishes to offer a substantive amendment that was not submitted prior to the deadline, the assembly, by a simple majority vote, may consent to the consideration of such an amendment (adapted from Churchwide Assembly “Rules of Organization and Procedure,” Part Ten).
  - b. “A social statement...shall require for adoption a vote of two-thirds of those voting members present and voting in a Churchwide Assembly” (ELCA 12.12.01.).
  - c. It shall be recorded on the printed statement that the social statement was adopted by a majority of at least two-thirds of the assembly.
  - d. Implementing resolutions shall be printed as part of the social statement.
  - e. An addendum summarizing differing points of view shall be added to those statements that elicit significant division in the Churchwide Assembly.

### **Social Statement Use**

1. All expressions of this church are expected to encourage use of social statements. The Office of the Presiding Bishop through the staff of Theological Discernment shall provide counsel when questions of interpretation or application arise.
2. The Office of the Presiding Bishop through the staff of Theological Discernment shall cooperate with other churchwide units and synods to develop accompanying resources and to encourage the use of social statements in this church.
3. Synods shall interpret social statements in a manner consistent with the interpretation of the Office of the Presiding Bishop (ELCA 10.21.e.8.). This interpretation may include resolutions adopted by the Synod Assembly that apply social statements to issues that are particular to the territory of the synod.
4. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall provide periodic reports to the Church Council on the use and implementation of social statements.

### **Social Statement Reconsideration**

Churchwide Assemblies may reconsider previously adopted social statements. Such reconsideration may involve either a revision or removal of the statement. This may be done in two ways:

1. A Churchwide Assembly, by a two-thirds vote, may call for the reconsideration of a social statement at the next assembly. Subsequent to such a vote, the social statement shall be referred to the Office of the Presiding Bishop for re-study. The proposed change and the reasons for it shall be made available to this church with an official notice of such proposed action to be sent to the synods by the secretary of this church at least three months prior to the Churchwide Assembly at which it will be considered. A two-thirds vote of the assembly shall be required to revise or remove the social statement.

2. The Church Council by a two-thirds vote of its voting members may ask the Churchwide Assembly to reconsider a social statement. Such Church Council action must be taken no later than at the Church Council meeting in the autumn prior to the assembly. The proposed change and the reasons for it shall then be made available to this church with an official notice of such proposed action to be sent to the synods by the secretary of this church at least three months prior to the Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the assembly shall be required to reconsider the statement and also to revise or remove it. Both actions may occur at the same assembly.

#### **Procedures for Social Policy Resolutions**

1. Social policy resolutions refer to actions, other than social statements, of the Churchwide Assembly or Church Council on matters of social concern.
2. Normally, social policy resolutions shall rely upon or be consistent with the teachings and policy of social statements.
3. The Church Council, synods, and voting members of the Churchwide Assembly may propose social policy resolutions.
4. Social policy resolutions shall be managed according to the established rules and procedures of the Church Council, synods, and the Churchwide Assembly.
5. In those exceptional cases where proposed social policy resolutions revise established teaching and policy, the Church Council, or the Churchwide Assembly shall assign responsibility to develop supporting foundational theological material and descriptive documents to accompany the proposed resolution.
6. All social policy resolutions must be approved by the Churchwide Assembly, or, in the interim, by the Church Council. Where revisions to established teaching and policy are proposed, a two-thirds vote of the voting members of the assembly or council shall be required to adopt the social policy resolution.

#### **Sphere Four: Interpreting and Applying Social Policy**

##### **Description**

The fourth sphere of activity is that of interpreting and applying the social policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to public and corporate policy. This sphere of activity lifts up ELCA social policy documents and assists this church to consider the ways that its policy illuminates, forms, critiques, and guides human behavior and the structures of church and society. Further, it assists this church in its institutional policies and practices, including decisions about the advocacy work of this church. This sphere of activity typically results in documents and narratives that are expository and descriptive in nature. Messages are one form of document in this sphere of activity serving both to interpret ELCA social policy and promote moral deliberation (see sphere two).

This sphere of activity does not preclude or replace other ways in which social policy is interpreted within this church. ELCA social policy is interpreted daily by pastors, bishops, advocates in public and corporate sectors, and other church leaders (local, synodical, churchwide) as they live out their callings. In addition, some educational materials developed by churchwide units also are designed to interpret social statements. In the activity described in this sphere, however, the interpretation of this church's social policy is viewed as formal exposition and requires affirmation by the Office of the Presiding Bishop and review by the Church Council. The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit has in its advisory role an important and integral part in this process.

##### **Procedures**

1. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, shall manage this sphere of activity according to established procedures.
2. The frequency of developing interpretative material shall depend on such criteria as timeliness, expressed need by members of this church, and participation in ecumenical or interfaith coalitions addressing specific social topics for which this church has policy.
3. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, shall have responsibility to affirm activity in this sphere, and the Church Council shall review it.
4. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall inform the Conference of Bishops of this interpretative activity in a timely way.

## **Abiding Attitudes and Aims**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sets forth these policies and procedures as a means to enrich faithful social responsibility and effective social witness. Throughout the four spheres of activity outlined above, it strives to be guided by some abiding attitudes and aims:

- that its posture be self-critical, modest, and authentic;
- that its conversations be characterized by respect for participants and others;
- that its deliberation be based upon careful analysis;
- that it not simplify complex issues and not accept easy answers to difficult problems;
- that in its ministry this church use the rich resources of its members, agencies, and institutions as well as those from other churches and ecumenical bodies; and
- that, being transformed and renewed by the Gospel, members of this church may “discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

Through committed and balanced attention to the four spheres of activity may the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make a significant contribution to the society and world in witness to God’s just and loving intention for all of creation and in grateful response to God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ.

## **Appendix: “Messages on Social Issues”**

### **Description**

Messages are normally brief communications that draw attention to a social issue and encourage action on it. They provide this church flexibility to respond on selected occasions with timely and perceptive counsel on new situations and pressing concerns.

Messages are communications that the Church Council adopts and are thus distinct from social statements, which are adopted only by the Churchwide Assembly. Messages are not the result of widespread deliberation in this church (as are social statements) but are intended primarily to encourage further discussion and action on specific current social issues among ELCA members. They are not new policy positions of the ELCA but build upon previously adopted social statements and social policy resolutions.

Messages address the contemporary situation in light of the prophetic and compassionate traditions of Scripture. They point to human suffering, grave injustice, pending danger, social perplexity, or hopeful developments and urge that evil be resisted, justice done, and commitment renewed.

Messages express the convictions of the leaders of this church who communicate them and who believe that their message should be heard in this church and beyond. They signal certain priority concerns that arise from this church’s mission in the world. Messages are based upon and are consistent with this church’s social statements and social policy resolutions. Normally, no more than one message is considered in each meeting of the Church Council.

### **Procedures**

1. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall oversee the development of messages on social issues.
  - a. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall work closely with other churchwide units, and synods in the selection of issues and the preparation of messages.
  - b. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall be guided by the following criteria in selecting issues for messages:
    - 1) the issue’s consistency with this church’s social statements and social policy resolutions;
    - 2) its pertinence to this church’s ongoing mission;
    - 3) its significance in society; and
    - 4) its timeliness and urgency.
  - c. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall recommend to the Church Council that it adopt the proposed message.
  - d. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall be responsible for the production and distribution of adopted messages.
2. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall coordinate the plans for proposed messages with the Church Council.
  - a. When the Office of the Presiding Bishop begins work on a message, the Church Council shall be notified of the office’s plan to present a message to the council.
  - b. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall ensure that the Church Council receives the text of the message upon its recommendation.
3. The Church Council shall act upon the recommendations from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and adopt, modify, or reject the message.

4. Under extraordinary circumstances, the Church Council, after consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop, may suspend these procedures (which normally take at least two or three months) to respond to an especially urgent situation.

*Adapted from “Messages on Social Issues,” which was approved by the board of the Commission for Church in Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, October 7, 1989, and adopted by the Church Council, November 19, 1989.*

---

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *This document replaces “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns,” adopted by the Church Council in 2006. The 2006 document replaced the document by the same name, which was adopted by the Church Council in 1997. The 1997 Churchwide Assembly affirmed the adoption of that document by the Church Council and authorized the council to make appropriate adjustments in these policies and procedures as further experience would indicate. The 1997 document replaced the document “Social Statements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Principles and Procedures” that was affirmed by the first Churchwide Assembly (1989).*

<sup>2</sup> *The constituting convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America resolved to “receive the social statements of the existing churches as historical documents.” The board of the Commission for Church in Society voted “that the term ‘historical documents’ in the resolution of the constituting convention to the Commission for Church in Society regarding AELC, ALC, and LCA social statements be interpreted to mean that common elements of the former statements be utilized as the interim contextual basis and guiding principles for present advocacy work until such time as the ELCA develops and adopts new social statements” (minutes of board meeting, September 17–19, 1987). The Office of the Presiding Bishop distributes these social statements and encourages their continued use in this church until an ELCA social statement replaces them. The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches did not develop formal social statements in its short history.*

Copyright © April 2011 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Permission is granted to reproduce this document as needed, providing each copy displays the copyright as printed above.