



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

A Women and Justice Task Force Resource

### “A Path Appears” discussion questions

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists and authors Sheryl WuDunn and Nicholas Kristof sought out stories of gender-based oppression and stories of hope for women and girls in this documentary that shows there is more than one voice in the gender-inequality story. The stories included are from the United States and around the world. The film presents the stories of victims and survivors of gender-based inequalities and violations of human rights as a reality of our world. However, the film also shows solutions that target the root of the problem in order to empower women. These stories offer powerful insights into the lives of women and girls around the world. Hope and change are possible with awareness. As the authors say: “The challenges facing women will never be addressed if they are borne in silence.”

As you watch the film and work your way through a group discussion, we hope that you continue to consider what God calls the church to think and do about inequalities. Thinking about the privileges, races and ethnicities of the survivors and advocates and about the language they use can help us to see these stories as part of a larger picture. These questions are a starting place. You are encouraged to begin to form your own questions about the stories you have seen in the film. For additional information on hosting a screening or discussion, go to [www.pbs.org/independentlens/path-appears/resources](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/path-appears/resources).

#### **Episode One: “Sex Trafficking in the USA”: Sex Trafficking and Prostitution 1: Prevention and Intervention (Boston/Chicago), Sex Trafficking and Prostitution 2: Leaving Behind the Life (Nashville)**

1. In the introduction to this episode, Hilary Clinton says, “Stories are powerful.” How have the stories of the women and girls in this first episode made you think and feel? Did any of them surprise you or help you see in new ways? How?
2. Sometimes it’s easier to imagine that problems like sex trafficking only happen far away, but we are called to see things that we don’t want to see, right here in our own communities. The victims and perpetrators of sex trafficking are our brothers and sisters; the health, life and dignity of victims are our shared responsibility. Describe the ways you see connections between domestic and international trafficking. When you consider our human unity, how do we begin to see the problem and possible solutions differently?
3. This episode illuminates the many social and systemic factors that can make girls and women vulnerable to being trafficked: poverty, racial and ethnic inequality, insufficient social services, ignorance, and commodification of female bodies. As sinners and saints, we all participate in this web of social factors. How does your participation in this web change the way you see yourself contributing to sex trafficking, and how you can engage in action to dismantle it?
4. Sheryl WuDunn talks about the importance of “innovative strategies for making a difference,” strategies like residential programs and the National Day of Johns Arrests. What strategies for

combatting sex trafficking (either those brought up in the episode or not) make you feel the most hopeful? Which ideas make you feel empowered to do something in response to the problem of sex trafficking? In what ways do you see God's love at work in any of these strategies?

**Episode Two: "Breaking the Cycle of Poverty": Poverty and Early Childhood Intervention (West Virginia), Forced Child Labor (Haiti), Teenage Pregnancy (Colombia)**

1. What about this episode struck you? What surprised you? What moved you?
2. Nicholas Kristof suggests that, while gender bias constrains people, poverty is a parallel but separate constraint. Do you see poverty and gender inequality as parallel but separate? In what ways do you see poverty and gender inequality as intersecting? Do these inequalities appear in the same ways domestically or internationally?
3. This episode explores the ways poverty and gender inequalities seem to be at the root of many social problems. Why do you think girls/women are not equal to boys/men in society? Does Christianity have any influence on this? How does your faith shape your understanding of these causes and effects?
4. What is gained and what is lost by focusing more on female voices and not including male perpetrators, fathers and partners in the episode?
5. In this episode, Kristof says, "You can't solve problems if you're not aware of them." What can you do, in your church and in society, to raise awareness about these problems?

**Episode Three: "Violence and Solutions": Domestic Violence (Atlanta), Girls' Education and Gender-Based Violence (Kenya)**

1. This episode discusses violence, as well as failures in systems to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable. These situations are upsetting. Has this episode opened your eyes, surprised you, or made you think in new ways about gender-based violence in the U.S. or internationally? If so, how?
2. "A Path Appears" points out that shame, fear and isolation are often the result of gender-based violence and that those same experiences can often make people more vulnerable to sex traffickers, abusers and addiction. Why do you think this shame exists? What do you think contributes to that shame in religion, culture and in everyday life?
3. This episode argues that when it comes to pushing for change, our role is to help and support those already working in local communities. What is the role of the church in this work? Your congregation? Your synod? With our international partners?
4. As Lutherans, we believe that we are all sinners, unable to free ourselves, hoping and trusting in God's promise of grace – through justice, restoration and healing. What kinds of restoration and healing do you see "appearing" in "A Path Appears"? Does the "appearing path" give you hope? Why or why not?

**General questions for all the stories in the episodes. Play three to five stories to create a screening that meets your group's needs and interests. The stories are all approximately 15 minutes.**

1. Each story includes celebrity and expert voices to give us perspective and be our eyes and ears in the world. Do these voices clarify or obscure the stories of “the least among us?” How does your faith provide a lens to how you see these stories? Does your faith differentiate your perspective from the speakers in the film?
2. These stories all show ways that women and girls are seen and treated as less-than. Share an example of this from your own life, experience or observation. How does this inequality affect the people in our lives and around us?
3. The film focuses on what women and girls face and how they transform their lives. But voices of men and boys are included as well. What role can men and boys play in transforming gender-based inequality? As allies or advocates? As perpetrators? What do you imagine justice looks like for these women and girls? (For more information, see the ELCA social teachings on criminal justice, community violence and peace at <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society>.)
4. The “hope” that these episodes highlights is that even small successes are still successes. Consider Matthew 25: 40 – “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” These stories focus on incremental action and seeing hope in seemingly hopeless realities. Where do you see hope and God’s love at work in the film? Faith calls us to act in love. How can you and your congregation become a part of a movement?