

1 **Draft of a Social Message on**
2 **Gender-based Violence**

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9 *For Study and Response*
10 *Prior to Nov. 26, 2014*

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13 *The response form can be downloaded from or filled out online at www.elca.org/socialmessages*

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21 **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

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27 **September 2014**
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54 **Preface**

55 Gender-based violence has been a largely ignored epidemic in human society. This message [if
56 adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)] seeks to bring
57 the epidemic into the open for the sake of survivors and perpetrators, for education and deliberation, and
58 as a call to action. Each of these goals requires different kinds of written expression, namely the
59 difference between personal words and stories, description and analysis, and endorsement and
60 recommendation. These three kinds of expression are interwoven throughout because each is necessary
61 and each depends upon the other as this message begins to present a whole and faithful account.

62 **I. A starting place: words to those who suffer or inflict gender-based violence**

63

64 *A survivor may say to other survivors:*

65 We are created, loved and redeemed by God through Christ. Our bodies, hearts and minds are
66 beloved by a gracious God who, the Bible tells us, creates each person *imago dei* (in God's image) and
67 God weeps with us because we have been hurt and betrayed. God fiercely opposes gender-based violence
68 because those who commit it have treated us as their objects and heinously violated our bodies, hearts and
69 minds. Such violation is not right.

70 Sometimes it seems as if faith is only about our hearts and minds, but faith also has to do with our
71 bodies. One of our church’s pastors writes: “Bodies which have been assaulted and abused are loved by
72 Christ, anticipated in his death, redeemed through his incarnation and resurrection, and will be healed and
73 restored in God’s own time. Such a teaching insists upon God’s own reverence for the flesh. The body
74 remains precious despite the injury done to it.”¹ Our flesh is beloved. Our flesh is also known, for Jesus
75 was also exposed, tormented and wounded. He also cried out to ask why God had forsaken him in his
76 deepest moments of need and fear (Mark 15:34). We are not alone.

77 *Members of the ELCA may say to those who commit gender-based violence:*

78 God condemns such violence. God weeps when you use the gifts of strength, thought and action
79 to inflict gender-based violence on another person. Your actions wound those you hurt, as well as God
80 and God’s creation. The power you seek is evil, but God calls you to the true life and richness found in
81 kindness, compassion and mercy. You may yourself be a survivor of gender-based violence or other
82 violence. The Apostle Paul writes that God asks us not to pass along violence (Romans 12:9-21). God
83 calls you to repent, seek forgiveness and amend your life with the help of others.

84 *Members of the ELCA may say to survivors:*

85 God says no to such violence. God condemns what someone has done to hurt you and to have
86 power over you. God’s love gives life. Through God’s promises, we have life. God promises that
87 nothing shall stand between you and the good news of God’s love, grace and healing in Jesus Christ, not
88 even the one(s) who hurt you. This is the good news of grace for you. We know that bodies matter
89 because not only has God become one of us in Christ, but we also know that Christ is present in all
90 human experience, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ promises life.

91 The promise of the resurrection life in Christ is not just about the future — what will happen
92 when you die. It is for your healing, your embodiment right now. God’s intent is the healing of your
93 body, psyche, emotions and spirit—all of you, your whole being. Healing is possible because God’s
94 presence and power is to bring new life again and again. And it is through the preaching of the gospel
95 and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion that God shapes us, as bodies and as the body of
96 Christ together, to bind us to God’s self and one to another. We are the body of Christ. Together.

97 **II. What is gender-based violence? Definition, voices and descriptions**

98
99 Words of healing are crucial. Speaking that serves healing must ask what gender-based violence
100 is and why it happens. We now turn to this task.

¹ Joy A. Schroeder, “Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment: Incarnating Healing,” in *The Long Journey Home*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 193.

101 Gender-based violence is physical, sexual or emotional harm directed at a person because of their
102 **biological characteristics [green indicates a word present in the glossary]**, perceived or self-identified
103 **gender**, or significant difference from socially and/or religiously constructed definitions of masculinity
104 and femininity. Gender-based violence includes coercion and deprivation of freedom. Gender-based
105 violence occurs in a multitude of forms and may be experienced at any point in a person’s life.

106 *We listen, with God, to the voices of those who have suffered gender-based violence within*
107 *society and within the ELCA:*²

108 ***In society***

109 My fiancée punched me in the face in a hotel elevator
110 and dragged me out. It was caught on video.

111 A man broke into our house at night
112 and raped me in bed.

113 Because I was gay, a group of men severely beat me
114 and then hung me on a country barbed-wire fence to die.

115 My husband controlled all the money
116 and always told me I was worthless.
117 I had no way to leave.

118 ***In the ELCA***

119 A week after my hysterectomy, my husband dragged me off the couch by my hair and screamed, “Get off
120 your ass and get to work!” Then he kicked me in the abdomen.

121 I bled profusely while our daughters hid in their closet.

122 A trusted peer and friend sexually assaulted me at a Lutheran youth event.

123 My mentor had little response. Nothing was ever resolved.

124 I tried to counsel an abusive husband and abused wife.

125 During a session, he killed her and himself with a gun.

126 When I was a teen, my pastor made me feel special.

127 He coerced me into a long-term sexual relationship with him.

128 Four or five men gang-raped me after I marched in a Gay Pride parade.

129 A pastor going by on his bike covered my naked body with his jacket.

130 *We listen, as members of Christ's body, becoming aware that:*

131 The body of Christ suffers from gender-based violence.

132 We are wounded, bleeding and dying. The body of Christ is in crisis.

133 Our hope rests in Jesus Christ,

134 who by the power of the Holy Spirit

135 activates and enables the church to denounce and resist evil,

136 create safe communities, and work toward reconciliation and healing.

² These descriptive summaries actual events and personal stories.

146 There are many types of gender-based violence. Each of the forms puts at risk a person’s
147 freedom, body and life and violates that person’s psychological and spiritual integrity.

148 The scope of gender-based violence is enormous. People of all classes and of all ethnicities in all
149 nations suffer violence inflicted on them by others for gender-based reasons. Gender-based violence
150 happens in both private and public situations. It occurs in families, other social relations, the church, the
151 state, education, and in society more broadly. It affects people of every age and of every gender.

152 While many different people are affected by gender-based violence, women and girls³ are
153 especially targeted. Nationally, 25 percent of women over the age of 18 have experienced sexual or
154 physical violence at the
155 hands of a current or former
156 intimate partner. Globally
157 the percentage rises to 30
158 percent.⁴

159 This targeting
160 shapes and constrains their
161 lives as becomes clear from
162 the vulnerability of girls. Of
163 the 18.2 percent of women
164 who have survived rape or
165 attempted rape, 12.3 percent
166 were younger than age 12
167 when they were first raped
168 and 29.9 percent were
169 between the ages of 11 and
170 17. Girls ages 16-19 are
171 four times more likely than
172 the general population to be
173 the victims⁵ of rape,
174 attempted rape or sexual assault. And 93 percent of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker.⁶

Types of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence can include sexual and other physical assault, including murder; rape; harassment, sexual and non-sexual; sexual and physical abuse (by clergy, coaches, teachers, superiors, strangers, family members, caregivers or friends); stalking; intimate relationship violence, regardless of gender, including employment, housing, educational intimidation and obstruction, rape and murder; elder abuse or child abuse ; sex-specific torture; reproductive coercion; female genital mutilation (also known as female genital cutting); early and forced marriage; honor crimes; mail-order brides; dowry violence; practices used to decrease the number of girl babies, such as prenatal sex selection, infanticide, or child neglect; sex tourism; forced prostitution; human trafficking for sex; pornography; and violence during armed conflict, including rape, enslavement, torture and murder.

³ “Women and girls” is here used as an inclusive term.

⁴ For statistics as of the writing of this message, see Appendix.

⁵ The literature refers to both victims and survivors. This document uses both terms. The term *victim* stresses that harm has occurred; the term *survivor* indicates the reality after violence.

⁶ For statistics as of the writing of this message, see Appendix.

175 Worldwide, women, girls and gender non-conforming people live with the memory and/or the
176 fear of gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence.

177 What is universal about gender-based violence is that gender is a central motivating factor, yet it
178 is not the only one. Every act or threat of gender-based violence, every perpetrator, and every survivor is
179 influenced by **intersections** of identities and of privilege and oppression, such as race and ethnicity, age,
180 ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, social class, and economic situation.

181 These intersections show up in both social systems and in individual mindsets. For example, race
182 and ethnicity and age are significant factors in gender-based violence. In the United States, some women
183 of color experience higher rates of intimate partner violence and rape than the rate of all women together.⁷

184 Gender-based violence also is *not* limited to injuries inflicted by men on women and girls. There
185 is increasing awareness of sexual and physical violence against men and boys;⁸ intimate partner violence
186 against men by women; and intimate partner violence within same-gender relationships. Such violence is
187 wrong. Some of this violence is gender-based; some is not.

188 **III. Context and sources of gender-based violence**

189
190 Gender-based violence is a global problem and continues unabated; it happens everywhere. The
191 United States is part of this global problem. As a Lutheran body in the United States, this church
192 primarily addresses our U.S. context as the one in which we have immediate call and responsibility. This
193 national context includes attention to the fact that gender-based violence occurs within ELCA
194 congregations and affiliated institutions and organizations.

195 While focused nationally, however, this social message does acknowledge the global character of
196 the problem and the importance of working worldwide to address gender-based violence. The ELCA
197 celebrates the relationships of ongoing accompaniment concerning gender-based violence with global
198 partners. It is through shared service, advocacy, theological dialogue, and ecumenical and inter-faith

⁷ See Appendix for statistics as of publication.

⁸ See, e.g., Lara Stemple and Ilan H. Meyer, "The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 6 (June 2014): e19-e26. This research focuses on male victimization in institutions such as mental health and criminal justice. There is also growing public knowledge of male victimization by clergy, coaches, teachers, caregivers and peers (such as through sexual harassment and hazing). Notable in this research is that when men and boys are in situations in which they are vulnerable to the power of others over them, it can lead to physical and emotional harm to them. Age, race and class can be contributory factors in situations of vulnerability. For greater insight into violence against gender non-conforming men, see Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, with Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 3.

199 relations that it becomes possible to care wisely for people’s immediate needs and to address root causes
200 of gender-based violence.⁹

201 The causes of gender-based violence are complex and multiple. How human beings think and act
202 socially and religiously are closely intertwined with the dynamics of power and control. While each act
203 of gender-based violence may be an individual's action, it is shaped by power dynamics that function to
204 subordinate another person and coercively control them. This dynamic is possible in every relationship;
205 thus, everyone is potentially affected by gender-based violence.

206 Regardless of who is the target of gender-based violence, this dynamic of power and control is
207 rooted in the values of a particular social system; globally, this social system is **patriarchal**. Gender-
208 based violence is recognized internationally as essential to maintain gender inequality.

209 Thus work to end gender-based violence must be focused on understanding mindsets about
210 gender, power and violence, and how human beings act out what we think as individuals influenced by
211 communities and institutions. Ways of thinking affect us all — survivors, perpetrators and bystanders.
212 Not only individuals, but families, communities and societies suffer. We, the body of Christ, suffer.

213 While there is a common root to gender-based violence, there are local expressions of it
214 worldwide. Each act of violence is particular — someone harms someone else — yet each act occurs
215 within or is supported by a social system. In other words, every act of violence has a context and varies
216 across time and place.

217 Even though gender-based violence is not exactly the same in every location, these are not
218 isolated instances. To truly understand gender-based violence and to create safety and well-being, it is
219 necessary to understand the particularities of each act of violence, the array of the many forms of this
220 violence, *and* its place in the context of patriarchal social systems. A patriarchal social system is male-
221 dominated, male-identified and male-centered; it operates with a high value on control of women and
222 “non-dominant others.” Though there has been much social progress toward gender equality in the United
223 States, patriarchy is still the dominant *social system* in the United States and within Christianity.

224 The definition of patriarchy as a social system is not a description of every person, social
225 relationship, Christian congregation, etc. It is, instead a description of a nexus of social relations, habits,

⁹ The work of The Lutheran World Federation is one example of the global efforts in which the ELCA participates. See, e.g., “Churches Say ‘No!’ to Violence Against Women” (Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, 2002), <http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Churches%20Say%20No%20to%20Violence%20against%20Women.pdf>, and Elaine Neuenfeldt, ed., “Lutheran World Federation Gender Justice Policy” (Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, 2013), <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-gender-justice-policy>, which is implemented through all realms of Lutheran World Federation service, advocacy and dialogue. The ELCA participates in such work in several ways, e.g. The Lutheran Office for World Community.

226 laws, ideas and beliefs, often religious, in which *everyone* participates in varying measures.¹⁰ A
227 patriarchal social system both relies upon and results in significant male dominance and female
228 subordination.

229 This dynamic is kept in place through tools of power and control. Gender-based violence
230 functions as one such tool, whether as threats, actual acts or inadequate responses to such acts. For
231 example, sexual harassment in schools and work places serves to intimidate girls and women from
232 asserting themselves and from developing their gifts fully. Rape also serves as a means of control,
233 whether within dating, marriage or war. As particular targets of rape, women thus learn to live in fear,
234 wrestling with this ceaseless threat and its implication that they are objects of control.

235 A culture of patriarchy requires and depends upon female subordination and thrives through
236 structural, theoretical and religious gender inequality. Whether recognized or not, patriarchal values
237 permeate how U.S. society operates.

238 In light of this systemic factor, this message contends that a critical step to decrease gender-based
239 violence is to change social and religious understanding and practices that make the violence possible.
240 Specifically, gender-based violence must come to be understood in its context of social structures, gender
241 roles and gender-based discrimination. Longstanding efforts such as rights-based arguments made within
242 the law, therapy and pastoral counseling are essential and beneficial. Years of activism, research and
243 scholarship demonstrate, however, that these alone cannot address the depth and tacit approval of this
244 society's gender-based violence.¹¹

245 While no one solution will bring an end to gender-based violence, the ELCA recognizes and
246 affirms that restoring health and well-being to all of God's people requires a multi-faceted approach. This

¹⁰ A patriarchal social system is *dominated* by the voice and authority of men. In such a social system, what is most highly valued is *identified* as male-oriented. A patriarchal social system is *centered* on males; the world is portrayed with men as the main actors in life and reflects their ideas and values. To maintain male priority in a social system, all "others," including women, gender non-conforming people, and non-dominant men must be and are socially devalued or diminished or controlled. One implication of a patriarchal social system is that the people who are "good" are the ones who endure gender-based violence and remain silent about it, do not challenge male privilege, and do not transgress binary gender boundaries. See Allan A. Johnson, *The Gender Knot*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2005) and *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

¹¹ See Elizabeth M. Schneider, *Battered Women & Feminist Lawmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 20-56. Advancement of international human rights — women's rights as human rights — is important in the creation of global change based on universal claims. Working to end gender-based violence and other gender-based discrimination through human rights arguments and standards can provide empowerment for people's legal consciousness, sense of identity, psychological health and political and moral agency. Addressing gender-based violence depends in part on human rights-based arguments. Nevertheless, human rights assertions alone cannot create the conditions to weaken the prevalence and intensity of gender-based violence. Rather, lessening gender-based violence depends upon changes in social and religious consciousness; thus, part of this church's work is to address the ways we see and think about God, the world and ourselves. If there is no social and religious change, people who are harmed by gender-based violence will only be able to continue to ask for mercy and protection in a world that sees and thinks about them as deserving the violence.

247 reality means the ELCA is called to speak and act prophetically to address the root causes and values,
248 structures, and results of our patriarchal social system.¹²

249 The way forward is multi-faceted because every act of gender-based violence is unique and
250 specific. Each survivor needs to be met at the point of their pain; each perpetrator needs to be held
251 accountable for the violence they commit.

252 At the same time, addressing gender-based violence requires careful attention to social and
253 religious contexts since these contexts and the personal experiences of violence are mutually related.
254 Decreasing gender-based violence will therefore require action in many aspects of life and its
255 intersections, including in social movements, politics, law, education, families and religion. For this
256 church, the way forward begins with confession of sin.

257 **IV. Confession of sin**

258
259 The ELCA as part of the body of Christ confesses its sin. We are called to confess both as
260 individuals and corporately as part of the church catholic. We, as part of this church, are in a body that
261 has victims and perpetrators. The confession of both our individual sin and our corporate sin allows the
262 truth to be told and orients our efforts to address all aspects of gender-based violence (1 John 1:5-9). The
263 church confesses together.¹³

264 To sin is to trespass our relationships of trust and love with God and with other humans and all of
265 creation, yet sin is also a web in which we are corporately bound. Sin produces suffering and
266 destruction.¹⁴ Far too often, far too many of us have failed God and others:

- 267
- 268 • We have failed to care for victims and survivors of gender-based violence;
 - 269 • We have failed to do what is necessary to prevent it; and
 - We have failed to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

270 We are called to confess that gender-based violence is about *us*, as people in the body of Christ in
271 the ELCA. We are not simply in a position of rescuing or caring for people outside of this church.
272 Rather, we participate in the forces of sin and are called to confess that we often have failed to recognize
273 our own participation in gender-based violence, as individuals and as a church.

¹² Readers are referred to the ELCA social statement anticipated in 2019 on this and related issues.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the call to communal confession very well: “It is not enough for individuals to repent and be justified....[T]he church must likewise repent and be justified. The community that is from God to God, that bears within itself eternal meaning, endures in God’s sight and does not melt into the fate of the many. It is willed and created and has become culpable; it must seek repentance, believe in and experience justification and sanctification, and experience judgment and grace at the limits of time.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 119.

¹⁴ See Ted Peters, *God — The World’s Future*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 162-178.

274 We are called to confess that far too often we have remained silent, or allowed ourselves to
275 remain oblivious to gender-based violence, or even resisted acknowledging what is happening. We are
276 called to confess that as a church we often deny the realities of gender-based violence and resist hearing
277 God’s call to take it seriously.

278 We are called to confess that far too often too many of us have actively or passively contributed
279 to the ways that religious ideas, people and institutions have encouraged or permitted gender-based
280 violence. And we are called to confess that corporately we are ourselves caught in the web of interwoven
281 systems that deny or reinforce gender-based violence in church and society.

282 This church also looks with thanksgiving to God through Christ as the source of salvation and the
283 hope for our lives. Such confessions are not the end but beginnings. We in this church who confess give
284 thanks for the promise of forgiveness and the opportunity to amend our ways. We will pray that such
285 confession would turn us to new paths that completely alter our understanding of and our response to
286 gender-based violence. We will pray that such confession might turn us to work that better conforms this
287 church to the life-giving ways of God.

288 **V. Religious contributions to the problems**

289
290 While religious consciousness and practices are not the sole contributors to gender-based
291 violence, this church acknowledges how religious factors often contribute extensively. First and
292 foremost, people of faith have responded too often with silence. Behind the statistics of gender-based
293 violence are incredibly unspeakable atrocities, but they are so common that they have come to be
294 expected.¹⁵ Sometimes silence flows from not seeing. Sometimes it takes the form of oblivion — when
295 we choose to be uninformed — or to turn away deliberately, so that we do not see what we do not want to
296 see.

297 Religious people and institutions also deny and resist. It is easier to deny what we hear, see and
298 otherwise know than to face it. It is easier to resist naming what has happened or what is happening than
299 to name it. For example, when intimate partner violence is misidentified as marital misunderstanding or
300 anger mismanagement, what is really at play is denied and resisted. In such cases the dynamic of power
301 and control that is strategically used by one partner to harm another is not seen or acknowledged. These
302 different forms of denial and resistance are a failure to care for victim/survivors of gender-based violence.

303 In this regard, the “ministry of nice” that prevails in many congregations leads, too often, to
304 discrediting hints or reports of gender-based violence by victims. People of faith can be, in that sense, too
305 often like the Levite or the Priest (Luke 10:25-37) who walk past one who has been injured, because we

¹⁵ See Elizabeth Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendecide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014) and *Miss Representation*, directed and written by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (New York, N.Y.: Virgil Films & Entertainment, LLC., 2012), DVD.

306 do not want to “involve ourselves.” We may be afraid of confronting people, appearing to take sides in
307 relationships, or triggering traumas for others by talking openly about gender-based violence.

308 But God calls God's people to do more: God calls us to stop, listen, see, name and minister in
309 the midst of ugliness and pain, among and to those whose lives are affected by gender-based violence.

310 Denial and resistance also cause us to fail to demand accountability from those who commit
311 gender-based violence. When the church fails to hold perpetrators and society (i.e., the law and criminal
312 justice system, healthcare, childcare, education, etc.) accountable to prevent, address and redress gender-
313 based violence, we also resist God’s call to care and so participate in the perpetuation of gender-based
314 violence.

315 Even when religious people or institutions respond, we may participate in the forces of gender-
316 based violence through faulty or inadequate responses. Certain religious responses fault victims, do not
317 hold perpetrators accountable, and perpetuate the violence.

318 Remaining ill-equipped to respond to and to prevent gender-based violence also perpetuates the
319 situations and forces that maintain cycles of violence. Those ministering to a person abused by an
320 intimate partner cannot provide appropriate care if they do not understand the cycle of power and control
321 in abuse or do not seek out the help of professional advocates. Likewise, faith-based views that
322 emphasize saving a marriage at the expense of safety and well-being enable abusers and deny the needs
323 and safety of the person who is abused.

324 People of faith also participate in perpetuating gender-based violence when we hold onto social
325 and church histories, harmful biblical interpretations and theologies, and ways of thinking and acting that
326 deftly reinforce gender-based violence. For example in the United States there is a history of treating
327 women as incompetent and incapable of rational thought. This pattern served to reinforce their lesser
328 status and deprived them of legal and economic rights necessary to make their own decisions and care for
329 themselves and sometimes their children.¹⁶ In a similar vein, as Lutherans we need to face our own

¹⁶ Only by 1993 was marital rape declared illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Historically, the common law doctrine of “coverture” stipulated that a free married woman did not have a separate legal existence from her husband. Married women could not own property in their own names, sign binding contracts, file suit, or, except under specific circumstances, control their earnings; in the event of their husband’s death, they were not able to act as guardian to their own children. See “Women, Enterprise & Society: Women and the Law” (manuscript collection), Harvard Business School and President and Fellows of Harvard College, Cambridge, Mass., 2010, web, http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/wes/collections/women_law/. Slave women had no legal existence apart from those who claimed to own them: they were traded, used and sometimes forced to have children by those with power over them. See “Women, Enterprise & Society.” Early laws and judicial decisions gave “legitimacy” to these concepts by permitting physical “chastisement” by husbands of their wives, permitting marriage to be asserted as a defense to rape, and by denying aid to victims based on their theory that judges should “not interfere with family government in trifling cases.” It would take more than 100 years before a state would enact a law criminalizing a physical assault by a husband on his wife. See *Bradley v. State*, 2 Miss. (Walker) 156 (1824) in “History of Battered Women’s Movement,” *SafeNetwork: California’s Domestic Violence Resource*, 1999, <http://www.icadvinc.org/what-is-domestic-violence/history-of-battered-womens-movement/>.

330 history, including the use of Martin Luther’s writing on “domestic discipline” and the long church history
331 of blaming victims for violence.¹⁷

332 At the heart of Lutheran biblical interpretation is Luther’s own ardent priority: interpretation of
333 Scripture should reveal God’s grace to humanity. Interpretation of Scripture should “carry Christ” to the
334 listener or reader.¹⁸ Yet sometimes scriptures have been and are used to emphasize the “value” of
335 submission, praise suffering as a “good,” and urge forgiveness without accountability. People suffer from
336 such harmful interpretations.

337 This church is speaking out against interpretations of Scripture that cheapen the treasure of faith,
338 give license to those who harm and fail to stand with victims. Yet some ask whether more remains to be
339 done in terms of biblical interpretation. Some urge this church to reckon more deeply with the biblical
340 legacy of violence against women, as well as the practical effects and considerations of the language of
341 faith.¹⁹

342 Some are asking this church in its concern about sources of gender-based violence to wrestle
343 more particularly with the predominance of male references to God. They believe that predominantly
344 masculine and male-associated language for God denies the fullness of who God is and perpetuates the
345 assumption that men are closer to the image and likeness of God. Other people of faith do not see
346 significant connections between such language and violence.

347 Likewise, some raise questions about the complex array of ways in which Christian theology,
348 including the Lutheran theological tradition, sometimes contributes to gender-based violence. For
349 example, the sacrifice of the cross sometimes is interpreted to mean that suffering “like Jesus” is good; in
350 instances of gender-based violence, this can be incredibly harmful theology.

351 How people of faith think about God and our relationships with God and with one another needs
352 careful consideration. As a church, clarity and refinement is needed as we seek to draw upon life-giving

¹⁷ See, e.g., Mary Pellauer, “Lutheran Theology Facing Sexual and Domestic Violence,” 2nd ed. (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2011),

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Violence_Theology_Booklet.pdf. Pellauer outlines Luther’s strong writing on the “proper” submission of women to men and his ambivalence on child abuse and wife-beating. Although he exhorts husbands to be peaceable, he writes, “[T]he female sex inclines naturally to what is forbidden to it, to reign, to rule and to judge. From this there come marital discord, blows and beatings” (“Titus, 1527,” *Luther’s Works* 29:57). See, e.g., Joy A. Schroeder, *Dinah’s Lament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) for a disquieting explanation of Christian theological victim-blaming through medieval Christianity.

¹⁸ The ELCA has an important opportunity to lift up and support reinterpretations of texts that have for centuries been used to keep women and girls in social and religious positions “below” men and boys, such as creation and sin in Genesis and New Testament epistles commonly referred to as the “domestic texts.”

¹⁹ Texts that portray violence against women that the ELCA at-large has not addressed include, for example, Abraham’s use of Sarah for his own safety (Genesis 12:10-20); Lot offering his daughters to rapists in order to protect male guests (Genesis 19:1-11); Schechem raping Dinah (Genesis 34:1-19); and the second wife who was betrayed by her husband and raped and murdered by a gang of men (Judges 19). Texts that reveal God in diverse ways include Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 49:15; Matthew 23:37; and Luke 15: 1-10.

353 resources in Lutheran theology *so that every neighbor is served* by the proclamation of the gospel, not
354 harmed.

355 As a church, there are many ways in which we are called to break our silence. As part of the
356 body of Christ, we must do so. Silence needs to end in organizations and schools and among
357 congregations, pastors, leaders and members. Gender-based violence is a human problem to which God
358 turns us in exceeding love through Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The whole church is called to
359 condemn this sin, to care for everyone who is harmed, and to question and change mindsets, systems,
360 theologies, policies and practices that support gender-based violence.

361 VI. Social forces

362
363 Intertwined with but often distinct from religious contributions to gender-based violence are
364 social forces that influence and support gender-based violence. Among these social forces are a wide
365 range of commercial sexual exploitation, the media, economics, racism, fears of sexualities and bodies
366 and. the legal system,.

367 *Commercial sexual exploitation*

368 The ELCA defines commercial exploitation as organized, for-profit sexual exploitation. It
369 includes audio or video sex, prostitution and human trafficking,²⁰ wherein approximately 80 percent of all
370 victims are women and girls. It also includes pornography and stripping which expresses, among others,
371 deep desires for power over and fears of women.²¹ Pornography demeans and devalues people who have
372 been thoroughly objectified, typically through violence. Most often, the objects of pornography, even
373 when a male is in the scene, are female.²² In pornography, violence is strongly linked to sex and
374 sexuality.

375 *Media*

376 “Public imagery of women is the text for all the other forms of violence [based on gender].”²³
377 Although not as violent as pornography, there is a steady message that women are subordinate to men
378 communicated through advertising, news and magazines, gaming, music, movies and television. As
379 “entertainment” many games, shows, movies, and music commonly incorporate images of violence
380 against women or girls as central elements in their story-lines. Viewers of mainstream media are exposed
381 repeatedly to subtle or not-so-subtle messages that women and girls are largely sexual objects, or deserve

²⁰ See “ELCA Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation,” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001), 1-3.

²¹ See Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church’s Response*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 64-65.

²² See Cooper-White, 78. According to Cooper-White, exceptions are gay male pornography.

²³ Cooper-White, 66.

382 and enjoy pain and humiliation, or are so irrational that they need to be dominated.²⁴ This legitimates the
383 “everydayness” of gender-based violence.

384 *Economic forces*

385 There are at least three general ways that experiences of gender-based violence and money are
386 intertwined. First, people who have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence may lose
387 their jobs, which often leads to the loss of other securities, such as transportation, housing, food and
388 children.

389 Survivors of gender-based violence may be so significantly harmed that they are unable to work
390 or they may suffer severe depression from the experience. They may miss work repeatedly for court dates
391 and other legal appointments and/or they may be seen as a risk by employers simply for having been
392 victimized. Any of these situations may be the reason for the loss of a job for a survivor.

393 Second, some victim/survivors feel compelled to remain in situations of gender-based violence in
394 order to maintain economic stability. For instance, someone abused by an intimate partner may be
395 compelled to remain in the abusive relationship because the partner earns the necessary income, often the
396 only economic means to care for children. In other instances, victim/survivors remain in jobs or
397 situations in which they are sexually harassed, coerced into sexual relations, and/or abused by colleagues,
398 supervisors, or peers because the job or the education are their only means to economic stability.

399 Third, some victim/survivors of gender-based violence are psychologically, emotionally and
400 physically forced or coerced into gender-based violence by people who want to make money at their
401 expense. Such is the case in the systems of human trafficking, prostitution, pornography, mail-order
402 brides and other forms of forced marriages.

403 *Racism*

404 Racism is an inherently evil force that has shaped not only the history of the United States, but
405 also individual lives and the social fabric of the present. Racism is rooted in the sinful idea that skin color
406 means there are categories of people who have different value and ability.²⁵ In the United States,
407 therefore, racism profoundly affects gender-based violence in at least two important ways.

408 First, multi-ethnic women and American Indian and Alaskan Native women are far more often
409 the targets of gender-based violence than all women together.²⁶

410 Second, racism may affect how victims of color think about turning to the U.S. legal system for
411 justice. When a racial or ethnic community is marginalized, the risks to expose each other to the U.S.

²⁴ See the film, *Miss Representation*.

²⁵ See *Freed in Christ: Race Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: ELCA, 1993), 4.

²⁶ See Appendix for statistics as of publication.

412 legal system may be perceived to be high.²⁷ A survivor in the same marginalized racial or ethnic
413 community as the perpetrator, therefore be less inclined to press charges. This perception may account
414 for the fact that women of color are less likely to report intimate partner violence than the average rate of
415 reporting for all women nationally.²⁸ There is a racial and ethnic situatedness to making the decision
416 about whether or not to report crimes and bring charges against someone.

417 *Fears of sexualities and bodies*

418 Although often not recognized there is a connection between violence against women and girls
419 and violence against anyone who does not conform to dominant gender and sexual expectations. For
420 example, violence against gay men because they are gay is a form of gender-based violence. Violence
421 against anyone who does not act according to normative expectations is also a form of gender-based
422 violence. For anyone who does not conform to dominant gender and sexual expectations, their lives are
423 shaped by the memory of, or fear of, violence.

424 *Laws and the legal system*

425 Within the last 50 years, laws pertaining to gender-based violence have proliferated compared to
426 other times in human history. There is increased realization that people should not have to experience
427 gender-based violence in various forms. For example, it is now illegal to sexually harass a co-worker, to
428 rape a spouse, and to abuse a spouse. This church affirms such developments.

429 Nevertheless, research reveals continued gender bias in the law and the legal system. For
430 example, though the rate of prosecution for domestic violence is increasing, in many jurisdictions a
431 substantial proportion of domestic violence defendants are given deferred prosecution or dispositions that
432 do not involve findings of guilt.²⁹ A trio of studies found, however, that at least 25 percent of the
433 defendants that received deferred sentences will re-abuse or reoffend.³⁰ Rape is overwhelmingly a crime
434 committed by men against women and girls. A recent study found, however, that only approximately *half*
435 of sexual assault cases that resulted in an arrest were ever prosecuted.³¹ Prosecution was more frequent

²⁷ See *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (Chicago: ELCA, 2013), for a discussion of risks such as dramatically higher incarceration rates, effect on employment prospects and others, 13.

²⁸ See “Statistics on Violence Against API Women,” *Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence*, accessed Sept. 4, 2014, <http://www.apiidv.org/resources/violence-against-api-women.php>.

²⁹ See “Practical Implications of Current Domestic Violence Research: For Law Enforcement, Prosecutors and Judges: Chapter 6. Prosecution Responses.” National Institute of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. United States Department of Justice. June 2009, accessed September 17, 2014. <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/practical-implications-research/ch6/pages/diverting-first-offenders.aspx>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See C. Spohn and D. Holleran. “Prosecuting Sexual Assault: A Comparison of Charging Decisions in Sexual Assault Cases Involving Strangers, Acquaintances, and Intimate Partners.” <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/199720.pdf>. Among the author’s observation was that sexual assault prosecutions were most likely when prosecutors believed “the evidence is strong, the suspect is culpable, and the victim is blameless.” “In cases that involved friends, acquaintances, and relatives, prosecutors were significantly

436 when the victim was viewed by the prosecutor as “blameless” and less frequent where the victim was
437 viewed as having engaged in “risk-taking behavior” or where her “reputation or character were
438 questioned.”³²

439 The nature of violence against women on college campuses is a further demonstration in which
440 multiple factors combine to support gender-based violence.³³ One factor is the inaction of institutions.
441 Recently, the Department of Education found it necessary to write to all colleges to remind them of their
442 obligations under federal law to provide a “prompt, thorough, and impartial” inquiry into allegations of
443 gender-based violence and their obligations, consistent with state law, to determine “whether appropriate
444 law enforcement or other authorities should be notified.”³⁴

445 Rape is, however, not solely a crime by men against women. Although until 2011 rape was
446 defined exclusively in this way by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI now uses a much more
447 comprehensive definition of rape. The research indicates that various obstacles in reporting sexual assault
448 or rape deter prosecution in some cases. In cases of gender-based violence against gender non-conforming
449 individuals or people in same-sex relationships, the law and the legal system continue to be even more
450 consistently biased. In other words, laws and the legal system do not yet properly ensure the freedom,
451 autonomy and full participation as citizens necessary for all people.

452 VII. Confession of faith

453
454 God’s beloved creatures suffer gender-based violence at the hands of each other. Such violence
455 violates human dignity, divides humanity, abuses power, and gets in the way of proclamation. Christ is
456 the beginning for Christians of any response to gender-based violence. God’s grace through Jesus Christ
457 binds the Christian church to God and the body of Christ one to another.

458 The church remains at the cross -- that is, remains steadfast -- when it takes the necessary risks to
459 proclaim faith in Christ and to resist and transform the roots of gender-based violence. It remains
460 steadfast when it seeks to renounce the idolatry and hatred of gender-based violence, to set clear
461 boundaries against evil, and to *be* the suffering flesh, the body of Christ that is the church.

462 God through Jesus Christ promises grace. Because we receive grace, we extend grace. It is that
463 simple. The promise of grace has meaning for our being and action right now. God gives, not takes, in

less likely to file charges if the victim engaged in risk-taking behavior at the time of the incident or if her reputation or character were questioned.”

³² *Ibid.*

³³ <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2010/02/24/4360/lack-consequences-sexual-assault>

³⁴ One in five women is sexually assaulted in college, but colleges often fail to respond appropriately. In a study of data submitted to the Department of Justice by 130 colleges, the Center for Public Integrity found that just 10 to 25 percent of perpetrators were expelled from college, leaving many victims of sexual assault to attend classes or live on the same campus as their rapist. <http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.html> .

464 grace; by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are likewise open to each other's needs. God's grace is
465 immediate and active in us and de-centers how much the ELCA may wish to preserve the way things are.

466 Through the incarnation, God stretches into human life, particularly our sorrow and experiences
467 of nothingness. Jesus Christ shares fully in our deepest need and vulnerability on the cross. Jesus was
468 betrayed, laid low, made into non-being, and was ripped apart by being fully exposed on the cross; his
469 whole body suffered from the evil of violence.

470 Whoever is likewise laid low, made into non-being, and ripped apart by gender-based violence is
471 fully known by God. God is there, in the depths of suffering. Because we all receive God's grace, we are
472 all equal before God. This refutes the belief that a human being has the authority to make someone else
473 into an object, especially through violence. This is reason to put our hope in Christ.

474 In the resurrection, God promises new life through the Spirit, providing the hope of divine
475 compassion, which is generated in us as we stretch out toward each other. To confess Christ means that
476 the body of Christ knows and sees itself as the violated body, as the body that is marked in the flesh,
477 together. Not them, us. We are marked. Our bodies are reoriented by this confession.

478 Word and sacrament bind us to God and to each other. The preached word is the proclamation of
479 God's grace through Jesus Christ. Sacraments are enacted word, God's communal acts that are the very
480 meaning and root of our relationships.

481 The sacraments disrupt our expectations of how life should be. In Baptism, water symbolically
482 washes us and our foreheads are marked with the sign of Christ, the cross, a symbol of the place of the
483 lowest in the world. Through this symbol of the margins, the body of Christ is held together in its vast
484 plurality.

485 In the Eucharist, Christ becomes part of our bodies; through this eating and drinking, we are
486 bound to Christ and to each other. Through it, we participate in the sorrow and pain of the whole body of
487 Christ — "all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to
488 overflowing."³⁵ And through the work of the Holy Spirit, we experience the body of Christ as relational
489 — "one inseparable body and flesh."³⁶

490 Thus through preaching and the sacraments, we are with each other, to be knit together in our
491 vulnerabilities through Christ, who is active in our real bodies. This church and its members are therefore
492 free to take the risks of the cross to love and serve and seek justice for people who experience gender-
493 based violence.

494

³⁵ "Word and Sacrament I," *Luther's Works* 35:54.

³⁶ "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6-8," *Luther's Works* 23:149.

495 **VIII. The ELCA's calling**
496

497 The ELCA's response in the face of gender-based violence is first and foremost to be prophetic,
498 to declare that faith in the God who creates, redeems and sustains means saying no to such violence. As
499 the ELCA affirms, "We care for the earth and serve the neighbor in society with the joyful confidence
500 that God's faithfulness alone sustains the Church and renews our faith, hope, and love."³⁷

501 God calls this church to recognize the needs of victims, survivors, bystanders and perpetrators
502 and to work within its power to address what causes and enables gender-based violence.³⁸ God calls the
503 church to respond with care, accountability and education as well as to give attention to the social order
504 through advocacy. Addressing gender-based violence is gospel-centered work; it is ministry.

505 *Respond to and prevent gender-based violence with care*

506 The ELCA commits itself to respond with swift and appropriate care and intervention with
507 anyone experiencing gender-based violence. Situations of gender-based violence such as ongoing abuse
508 are often volatile and can quickly escalate. In order to respond with safety and care for everyone
509 involved, the ELCA is called to strengthen and empower individual, congregational and institutional
510 responses.

511 **Congregations**

512 *The ELCA calls upon and encourages congregations to:*

- 513 • safely provide information for visitors and congregants on access to crisis care and safety
514 plans.
- 515 • put in place and enforce congregational policies and practices that promote safe and
516 healthy congregations.
- 517 • support survivors through local expert care giving and advocacy agencies with donations
518 of goods, money and volunteer services. Survivors have very practical needs: safety; shelter, food, and
519 clothing; mental health care; legal counsel; work and transportation; and child care and education.
- 520 • be clear with anyone experiencing gender-based violence that God's grace through Jesus
521 Christ means that God condemns how they have been hurt.
- 522 • be clear with perpetrators that God calls them to repentance, accountability and the
523 obligation to make amends.

³⁷ "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 10.

³⁸ The ELCA affirms, "This church must participate in social structures critically, for sin also is at work in the world. Social structures and processes combine life-giving and life-destroying dynamics in complex mixtures and in varying degrees. This church, therefore, must unite realism and vision, wisdom and courage, in its social responsibility. It needs constantly to discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values, and powers. . . . As a prophetic presence, this church has the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people." See "The Church in Society," 4.

524 • provide safe spaces for people to tell the truth of what happened to them and for them to
525 be believed.

526 *We commend congregations that:*

527 • care for survivors and people who might be vulnerable to gender-based violence through
528 any of the above means.

529 • support efforts to repent and recover on the part of those who have committed gender-
530 based violence.

531 *We call upon rostered and lay leaders of congregations to:*

532 • be prepared to respond to crises with the help of experts in the fields of gender-based
533 violence through training, education, dialogue and collaboration with local and national partners. This
534 will include education on appropriate interventions when gender-based violence occurs, including how
535 not to blame victims, preach forgiveness improperly, or reinforce unhealthy dynamics that enable gender-
536 based violence to occur.

537 • collaborate with local experts in care and advocacy in order to respond to survivors’
538 needs.

539 • care for people experiencing gender-based violence by believing them and helping them
540 to find the resources they need.

541 • preach about gender-based violence in order to speak the truth and care for others.

542 *We urge members in congregations in which other members experience gender-based violence,*
543 *or such violence occurs to:*

544 • speak the truth about what has or is happening.

545 • support networks of care and support.

546 • support, rather than blame, victims.

547 • love unceasingly, in the midst of pain, violence and ugliness, as a visible manifestation of
548 the love of Christ for all.

549 **Synods**

550 *The ELCA commends and encourages synods that*

551 • require training and education of their leaders on responding to and preventing all forms
552 of gender-based violence.

553 • partner with local experts and agencies to provide services to survivors and education for
554 the community.

555 *We encourage synods, their congregations, and other ministry sites on their territory to:*

- 556 • support education for congregations and pastors about laws and practices concerning
557 mandatory reporting of domestic and other forms of gender-based violence.

558 **Social ministry organizations**

559 *The ELCA commends social ministry organizations that:*

- 560 • provide care through protection and support of the many needs of survivors for safety and
561 well-being.

562 *Respond to and prevent gender-based violence with accountability*

563 Accountability assists in creating justice. This church is called to create, strengthen and use
564 policies and practices with strong means of accountability. This church is called to respond to assailants
565 by calling them to account for their actions. People who inflict gender-based violence need to be
566 accountable to the person they harmed, the families of survivors, society, and sometimes to the
567 community of faith. The ELCA has a role to play in changing the fact that the majority of perpetrators of
568 gender-based violence remain free and in communities. Accountability contributes to interrupting cycles
569 of violence.

570 Accountability for their actions is the first priority with assailants, yet many also need pastoral
571 care in a community of faith. When it is possible, pastors and other leaders may assist perpetrators with
572 confession and repentance even though this does not require or automatically assure forgiveness from the
573 survivor.

574 **Congregations**

575 *The ELCA calls upon and encourages congregations to:*

- 576 • Hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, including church leaders.
577 • Understand and uphold ELCA “Visions and Expectations.”

578 **Synods**

579 *The ELCA encourages synods, their congregations, and other ministry sites on their territory to:*

- 580 • provide and make public their policies on sexual harassment at public and sponsored
581 meetings and events.
582 • put in place transparent policies and practices that provide for safety, confidentiality and
583 due process for survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

584 **Churchwide organization and ministries**

585 *The ELCA encourages the churchwide organization to:*

- 586 • review its organizational policies and practices to ensure that they provide for safety,
587 confidentiality and due process for both survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.
- 588 • review ELCA “Visions and Expectations” to ensure the text adequately expresses
589 standards and expectations regarding gender-based violence.

590 **Educational institutions**

591 *The ELCA encourages church-related educational institutions to*

- 592 • review or put in place policies and practices that ensure safety, confidentiality and due
593 process for both survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

594 **Social ministry organizations**

595 *The ELCA encourages church-related social ministry organizations to*

- 596 • review or put in place policies and practices that ensure safety, confidentiality and due
597 process for both survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

598 *Respond to and prevent gender-based violence through education*

599 Through ongoing education, the ELCA is called to respond to and prevent gender-based violence.
600 Some of this education is practical. It is also faith-based. Life-giving witness to the gospel in theology
601 and teaching gives life; it does not contribute to practices, laws and beliefs that enable gender-based
602 violence. Thus the ELCA is called to work among many and varied partners to discern roadblocks and
603 resources within the Lutheran theological and practical tradition through dialogue, study and action.

604 **Congregations**

605 *The ELCA calls upon its congregations and their leaders to*

- 606 • Engage in education through dialogue, analysis and careful study of the social and
607 religious factors that contribute to gender-based violence, including understandings about the roles and
608 characteristics of men and women, ideas about and images of God, ideas about salvation, the cross,
609 suffering, sin and grace.
- 610 • Learn about and be prepared to respond to the specific contexts, needs and characteristics
611 of various forms of gender-based violence.
- 612 • Learn about secular theories and practices to address gender-based violence and dialogue
613 with others.
- 614 • Support and teach about healthy relationships, including sexual relationships.

615 **Educational institutions**

616 *The ELCA encourages church-related colleges that have not done so to*

- 617 • review their curriculum to break the silence by ensuring that matters regarding gender-
618 based violence are treated fully in courses appropriate to the subject matter.
- 619 • review the possibilities for events that encourage awareness among students of the nature
620 of gender-based violence and the means to dialogue.
- 621 • give appropriate attention to policies intended to curb gender-based violence and to foster
622 appropriate responses that avoid “re-victimization” of those who have suffered gender-based violence on
623 their campuses.

624 *The ELCA encourages seminaries to*

- 625 • include theological and practical preparation among seminarians that considers the
626 problems and resources found in Scripture and the Lutheran theological tradition.

627 *IX. The ELCA's social witness*

628
629 Bonded to Jesus Christ, this church announces that the God who justifies expects all
630 people and social institutions to do justice and to foster practices that serve the common good. Such
631 witness is given as Christians live out their callings as citizens or through the ELCA's various institutional
632 efforts as a public church.

633 This church is called to a social witness that is prophetic and includes robust advocacy.
634 That is, it is called to join its voice with and for those whose voices are often shunted aside in speaking
635 about what is needed to reduce gender-based violence. Such ministry must include advocacy for laws
636 that prevent gender-based violence, care for victims and survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and
637 empower efforts toward continual safeguards and change through local, state, federal and global
638 initiatives.

639 In the interplay of the social order a vast number of organizations and agents need to be
640 challenged toward prevention and reduction of gender-based violence. These include employers and
641 corporations, sporting organizations, public education, the healthcare system, public and private social
642 caregivers, the judicial system, the United States Armed Forces, members of the media, and leaders in
643 emerging social medias.

644 The changes needed will vary, obviously, according to the particular character of each
645 organization or system. Yet in each case the goals should reflect the development and application of
646 practices that protect, provide care, hold perpetrators accountable, and challenge mindsets. This church,
647 aware of its own sinfulness, will seek to witness to and urge the pursuit of such goals within the social
648 order, an order that ultimately answers to the God of justice.

649

650 Toward that end:

651 **Congregations, leaders and members**

652 *The ELCA calls upon congregations, leaders and members to*

653 • be local advocates within schools, judicial systems, healthcare and social services for
654 transparent and appropriate responses to survivors and perpetrators and for measures to decrease the
655 possibilities of gender-based violence.

656 • collaborate with others to advocate for improvements.

657 • advocate for legislation that prevents and responds to gender-based violence.

658 • advocate for improved crisis response in their communities through dialogue and
659 partnership with various public services.

660 • advocate for improvements in social discourse and practice about the intersections of
661 gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation and age.

662 • serve as witnesses and advocates for individuals going through legal processes.

663 • speak words of both gospel and law that counter religious contributions to gender-based
664 violence.

665 • call for accountability from prosecutors, the judicial system, and those in power when
666 they fail to respond, appropriately, to gender-based violence in society or their institutions.

667 **Churchwide organization**

668 *The ELCA calls upon those who speak publically on its behalf to*

669 • advocate for legislative and administrative efforts that reduce gender-based violence,
670 provide care for victims and survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and empower people to work for
671 continual safeguards and change through local, state, federal and global initiatives.

672 • make clear in appropriate public address that this church opposes religious contributions
673 to gender-based violence.

674 **Social ministry organizations**

675 *The ELCA calls on social ministry organizations to*

676 • work from their experiences in ministry with survivors toward the passage of preventive
677 laws and the encouragement of alternative models of responding to gender-based violence.

678 • expand means that empower survivors of gender-based violence to be leaders for change,
679 advocates and caregivers on behalf of others also hurt by gender-based violence.

680

681 **Commitments for a new beginning**

682

683 The way forward for reducing and ending gender-based violence is long and multi-faceted. Each
684 survivor needs to be met at the point of their pain; each perpetrator needs to be held accountable for the
685 violence they commit. At the same time, addressing gender-based violence requires careful attention to
686 social and religious contributions since these and the personal experiences of violence are mutually
687 related.

688 This church commits itself to listen, with God, to the voices of those who have suffered gender-
689 based violence within society and within the ELCA. This church commits itself, by God's grace, to walk
690 new paths that alter past understanding of and inadequate responses to gender-based violence. This
691 church commits itself to stand for changes in the social order that will foster the flourishing of *every*
692 person's life since all people have been made *imago dei* (in God's image, Genesis 1:17).

693 **Glossary**

694
695 **Biological characteristics:** The physical and physiological traits that we often associate with either males
696 or females, but observation and research show that such physical and physiological traits do not
697 exclusively belong to one or the other. These traits include not just genitalia, but also body hair, facial
698 hair, height, muscle mass, body fat, body shape, breast tissue and the size of hands and feet, to name a
699 few. These traits often shape how people are perceived or identify in terms of their gender.

700
701 **Gender:** Categories into which cultures/societies separate behaviors and characteristics that are usually
702 considered masculine or feminine. The most common gender identities are *woman* and *man*, but other
703 identities exist and are becoming more widely used and understood.

704
705 **Gender non-conforming:** Within this message, we use gender non-conforming to refer to people whose
706 gender identity, gendered way of acting in the world, and biological characteristics do not completely fit
707 within predominantly expected ways of acting as a man or a woman. There are many different identities
708 and experiences included under the umbrella of gender non-conforming.

709
710 **Intersection:** The way that one form of oppression or privilege can be shaped by and can shape other
711 forms of oppression or privilege. This means that the oppression experienced by a lesbian woman of color
712 will be different than that experienced by an economically impoverished gender non-conforming white
713 person. Factors that can intersect with and thus influence the individual experiences of gender-based
714 oppression include: age, ability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality/citizenship, social class,
715 economics and religion. Human identities are made up of many different intersections.

716
717 **Justice:** An underlying human sense about fairness, right treatment and reciprocity; there are many kinds
718 of justice people have in mind when they use the word. Some of them include: retributive justice,
719 corrective justice, distributive justice, restorative justice, structural justice, fair or equal treatment under
720 the law, ending oppression based on power differences, or biblical righteousness. In this document, the
721 term justice emphasizes the latter half of these meanings but always with the biblical emphasis on justice
722 as right relationship with God and within community.

723
724 **Patriarchy:** The social, institutional, legal, political, educational, economic, religious and interpersonal
725 systems of society that best serve men and the interests of men with status and power. While all people
726 within a patriarchal system participate in it, the system functions with men at the center. This means that,
727 sometimes unconsciously, people participate in systems that control and oppress women, girls, gender
728 non-conforming people, LGBTQ people, and all those who are not normative, heterosexual men.

729

730 Appendix: Global and National Statistics

731

- 732 • Globally, an estimated 30 percent of women who have been in a relationship have experienced
- 733 sexual or physical violence at the hands of their intimate partner.ⁱ
- 734 • Nationally, 25 percent of women over the age of 18 have experienced sexual or physical violence at
- 735 the hands of a current or former intimate partner.ⁱⁱ
- 736 • Nationally, race and ethnicity significantly affect the frequency of intimate partner violence.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 737 • Globally, an estimated 38 percent of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.^{iv}
- 738 • Nationally, almost 33 percent of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.^v
- 739 • Globally, one in five women will be a victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime.^{vi}
- 740 • Nationally, one in six women will be a victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime.^{vii}
- 741 • Nationally, 97 percent of rapes committed against adults (both men and women), are committed by
- 742 men.^{viii}
- 743 • Nationally, 60 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to the police and 97 percent of rapists will
- 744 never spend a day in jail.^{ix}
- 745 • Nationally, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 have experienced some form of sexual harassment in
- 746 public schools.^x
- 747 • Nationally, of those people who express a gender non-conforming identity while in grades K-12, 78
- 748 percent are made the victim of harassment, 35 percent are made the victim of physical assault, and
- 749 12 percent are made the victim of sexual violence.^{xi}
- 750 • Nationally, 25 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have been the victim of rape, and 72
- 751 percent have been the victim of other forms of sexual violence.^{xii}
- 752 • Nationally, an estimated 20-25 percent of lesbian and gay people experience hate violence within
- 753 their lifetimes.^{xiii}
- 754 • Nationally, of gender- and sexuality-based hate crime homicides in 2012, 53 percent of victims
- 755 were transgender women.^{xiv}
- 756 • Nationally, of gender- and sexuality-based hate crime homicides in 2012, 73 percent of victims
- 757 were people of color.^{xv}
- 758 • Nationally, in 2013, white men were more likely than any other racial and ethnic demographic to be
- 759 perpetrators of gender- and sexuality-based hate violence. Of all men who perpetrate gender- and
- 760 sexuality-based hate violence, the majority by age were 19 to 29 years old.^{xvi}
- 761

ⁱ World Health Organization, “Violence against Women: Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women,” WHO, last modified October 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>.

ⁱⁱ According to this survey, almost 64 percent of women who reported being raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked since the age of 18 were targeted by a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, boyfriend, or date. Likewise, those reporting assaults within the past year averaged more than three assaults per year. See Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 2000), iii.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*, women of color are more likely to be victimized than average, with American Indian/Alaskan Native women experiencing significantly higher rates of intimate partner violence (37.5 percent) than do women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, 41-60 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander women experience Intimate Partner Violence, “Statistics on Violence against API Women,” APIIDV, accessed Sept. 4, 2014, <http://www.apiidv.org/resources/violence-against-api-women.php>. See A. Raj and J. Silverman, “Intimate Partner Violence against South-Asian Women in Greater Boston,” *Journal of the American Medical Women’s Association* 57, no. 2 (2002): 111-114, and Mieko Yoshihama, “Domestic Violence against Women of Japanese Descent in Los Angeles: Two Methods of Estimating Prevalence,” *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 8 (1999):869-

897, cited in “Statistics on Violence Against API Women,” *APIIDV*, accessed Sept. 4, 2014, <http://www.apiidv.org/resources/violence-against-api-women.php>.

^{iv} World Health Organization, “Violence Against Women.”

^v Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports “Crime in the United States, 2000,” (2001), cited in National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Domestic Violence Facts,” *NCADV*, accessed Aug. 28, 2014.

^{vi} United Nations, “Ending Violence against Women and Girls,” *Resources for Speakers on Global Issues*, accessed Aug. 28, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/endviol/>.

^{vii} Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998), 11.

^{viii} Percentage was calculated from data in Tjaden and Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*, 47.

^{ix} The 3 percent statistic has been calculated by taking reporting rates into consideration. See, *National Crime Victimization Survey*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008-2012, and *Felony Defendants in Large Urban Countries*, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 2002-2006, cited in “Reporting Rates,” *RAINN*, accessed Sept. 5, 2014, <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/reporting-rates>.

^x American Association of University Women, “Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School,” (Washington, D.C.: AAUW, 2001), 20-21, cited in United Nations, “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women,” *UNWomen.org*, accessed Aug. 28, 2014, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

^{xi} Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A Mottet, and Justin Tanis with Jack Harrison, Jody L. Merman, and Mara Keisling, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 3.

^{xii} Of the 25 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who have been the victim of rape, survey statistics showed that all of them were lesbian or bisexual women. Both percentages were found from our own calculations of survey data from Mikel L. Walters, Jieru Chen, and Matthew J. Breiding, *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation* (Atlanta, Ga.: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013), 6-11.

^{xiii} Shelby Chestnut, Ejeris Dixon, and Chai Jindasurant, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2012* (New York, N.Y.: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2013), 10-13.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, 8.

^{xv} *Ibid.*

^{xvi} The most recent studies of hate violence show that in 2013 39 percent of perpetrators were perceived as white by victims, as opposed to other various racial or ethnic backgrounds, 72.45 percent were male as opposed to female or transgender, and 30.7 percent were between 19 and 29 years old. See Osman Ahmed and Chai Jindasurant, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2013* (New York, N.Y.: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2014), 51-53.