



FAITH, SEXISM, JUSTICE:

Conversations toward a Social Statement

A study from the ELCA Task Force on
Women and Justice: One in Christ



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

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A study from the ELCA Task Force on
Women and Justice: One in Christ

A letter from the presiding bishop

**I will pour out my spirit
on all flesh; your sons
and your daughters shall
prophesy.**
(Joel 2:28a)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The ELCA recognizes the God-given dignity of all people and is committed to the full and equitable participation of women and men in church and society. God rejoices – and the world is blessed – when all have opportunities to flourish and freely share their gifts for the common good.

I am heartened that we as a church body are engaged in a concerted discussion around women and justice in church and society. The 2009 Churchwide Assembly authorized a social statement process, and the work will continue long after a social statement is brought to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Right now, however, are the years for focused conversations.

Whatever your experiences and perspectives, you are invited to use this study, “Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement.” It is a call to hear new things and to explore together how matters of justice and sexism intersect with faith. I encourage its widespread use across our church – in congregations, conferences, circles, social ministry organizations, campus ministries, youth gatherings, homes and classrooms. Your participation in this process is important because the feedback you share (due by Aug. 31, 2017) will help the task force continue to think together with our whole church when they sit down to shape the first draft of a social statement.

As a pastor who has served in congregations and in synodical leadership, I am quite aware that it can be challenging to have conversations on these complex topics that are so close to our homes, congregations and communities. I believe the task force has produced a study for these conversations that you will find spiritually enriching, engaging, respectful, clear and well-balanced.

As people of God, set free in Christ and brought together in loving community, we are called to work for justice and the flourishing of all God’s people. We can be confident that the Holy Spirit will faithfully lead us through this conversation. God bless you as you join in.

In God’s grace,



Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Introduction: From the ELCA task force

Welcome to "Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement!" In 2009, the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA authorized a social statement process "on the topic of justice for women in church and society."¹ Our task force was convened to lead this process as the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ. This document is the result of our study and conversation so far. We hope that it will generate honest and empowering conversations about sexism and how it negatively affects individuals and families in our homes, congregations and communities.

As Christians we all are living into the promises of God and are being called to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). We know that Jesus Christ came that we may have life abundantly (John 10:10), but in the world around us, it is clear that countless people are suffering under the weight of injustice. They cannot live the abundant lives God intends. Many individuals and their families struggle emotionally, physically and economically because of the effects of sexism and patriarchy. These forces are personal, religious, social and economic. As members of the body of Christ that is the church, we are called to help all people live abundant lives that are just and sufficient – lives in which every individual and community is committed to the mutual values of respect, dignity, interdependence and equity.

As a task force, we designed this study to invite you into dialogue and action with us about faith, sexism and justice. We investigated and discussed a broad range of problems as a task force but could not explore every topic (sex trafficking, women and health care, women and the law, etc.) in this document. For this study, we have focused on:

1. Why do we need to talk together?
2. What problems do women face and what does justice require?
3. How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?
4. What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?
5. How can we address violence against women and girls?
6. Why do images and words for God matter?
7. How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

These issues are complex and hard for some to talk about. We trust, though, that when we come together as members of the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit is with us and among us. We hope that this study will help individuals and congregations hold honest and respectful conversations about *faith, sexism and justice*. We look forward to hearing feedback from you who take part in this process. (The response period runs until August 31, 2017.) We anticipate our common work together and invite you to pray with us that God's reign of compassion and justice "may also come to us."

In Christ,
Members of the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ

¹ www.ELCA.org; ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action CA09.06.31.

Thank you for your willingness to provide leadership for "Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement." As the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ, we pray that you will be blessed by the Spirit's presence as you participate with your congregation or group in this conversation about women and justice. We believe the conversation is vitally important in itself but deeply appreciate that your leadership will enable robust conversation and response as part of the ongoing work toward a social statement for the ELCA.

We have created this study with an expansive set of material, multiple entry points and varied ways to use it. It has been prepared with a modular approach – each module with a different writer – because we hope to aid many different audiences to engage these issues and provide response. Perhaps you are the pastor or member of a congregation where studies typically last three to four Sundays. Perhaps you are the leader of a study circle. Perhaps you wish to use these materials for your own learning and reflection. Perhaps you are a college or seminary professor with the ability to devote more time and depth. Be realistic about your timeframe and audience and then feel free to pick and choose what to cover. Look at the Going Deeper material as an option. Some additional materials also are found online only.

If your situation requires you to pick and choose modules, please use at least Module 1 because it provides a common foundation for the others. Module 2 also introduces general material that informs the remaining module topics. While every module is important, the remaining modules can be used in any number and order. In each one, the "must read" paragraphs are highlighted in green shading as a signal of the core material within the abundance of information, explorations, activities and conversation points. Give attention to these paragraphs as a way to lead participants into deep and fruitful conversation, rather than a forced march through every word in the module.

To help you prepare for your task, here are a checklist, tips for leadership and specific instructions on how to lead each module.

GUIDANCE

- Each basic module is planned to be 60 minutes long.
- Each participant should have either a printed copy of the booklet, a downloaded module or access to the electronic version.
- Modules 1 and 2 set the stage for all the other modules. Other modules can be used in any order, depending on your group's needs and interests.
- Learning objectives for each module (found in the side bar of each module) will help you clarify the learning goals.
- Learning objectives and the conversation covenant should be reviewed at the beginning of each session.
- More than enough discussion questions have been provided; be selective according to the needs and context of your group.

- Bible passages are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted. Be aware that other Bible translations may word things a little differently. This matters in particular for this study because some translations may emphasize male-centered choices of wording.
- The stories and illustrations found in this study are summaries of actual incidents as reported by members of the ELCA task force. If statistics or news stories are used, they are cited as the source. All seek to be true to contemporary life.
- The “Out the door” at the end of each module provides material for extending the learning and reflection into the next week.
- Response forms are available online or near the back of the study. There also is an overall response form found on page 137 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjssoverall>. Please encourage these to be used. These are the primary means for communicating responses to this study with the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice. Providing feedback in this way or online offers a valuable opportunity to join thousands of others in the work toward a social statement on women and justice.

1. Read through the entire study guide

Participants rely on you as a leader to have done background work to see the whole picture so that they can invest in each piece of the study. This study covers important theological content about women and justice, as well as ideas and data that span several arenas. Reading the entire study carefully will help you communicate its significance and overall approach.

2. Consider shared leadership

The task force envisions these seven modules as opportunities for conversations. In that spirit, invite another leader or a small team to share leadership with you. Your conversations as leaders about the material will help prepare you for the give-and-take likely to occur in the class. Having more than one leader over a seven-module period can help participants stay more engaged.

3. Rely on the structure that the study uses for modules

Each module was written by a different author but with a similar structure that includes:

- Module objectives stated in the side bar of each module
- Opening and closing devotional practices
- Scripture texts and other biblical reflection
- Examples, stories and data
- Group-oriented exercises
- Key topics and ideas, often expressed in “must read” paragraphs
- Discussion questions

Do your best to get through the module each time, even if you have to shorten some of the sections. Watch for the shading in the text to identify key points.

4. Be prepared with the necessary materials and handouts

Ensure that participants have the materials they need, which may include Bibles, paper, pens and copies of the handouts. The best hospitality often comes down to a functioning copy machine and a calm leader!

5. Include Scripture and prayer in your preparations

Many of the examples and feelings evoked in this study touch on personal issues and feelings. Asking people to be vulnerable and share experiences, rather than merely sharing opinions, requires both leaders and participants to create a safe space. Spend time with the NRSV Scriptures that are part of each module during the week before. Sit in prayerful silence, holding the lives and needs of participants in God's care. Share these reflection practices with other participants.

6. Remember that it is the good news in Jesus Christ that unites us

Participants will bring a wide variety of thoughts, beliefs and opinions about the topics discussed in this study on women and justice. At times it may feel like their ideas are widely divergent and impossible to resolve. That isn't necessarily a problem. This is a conversation, after all, rather than a consensus. What's essential is to remind ourselves that we meet within the inclusive ministry of Jesus Christ and the good news of his life, death and resurrection.

7. Prepare yourself to be a non-anxious presence

Obviously the issues your group discusses about women and justice will resonate in different and personal ways for each participant. Remember that you are a guide who is facilitating a conversation. Use these ideas to maintain your positive leadership:

- Work to see disagreements as places for dialogue.
- Be a neutral, non-anxious presence.
- Remind participants that listening is as valuable as speaking.

8. Get grounded in discussion management

The nature of this study and its many connotations can easily spark lively discussions and even conflict. Rather than being surprised by varying views or feeling unprepared to navigate difficult moments, we suggest you review resources about discussion facilitation. Use these ideas when the discussion stalls out in conflict:

- Invite group members into a moment of silence.
- Ask participants to take time to write down their thoughts and feelings.
- Go back to the text to reground yourselves.

- Stop for a moment of prayer.
- Reread the conversation covenant aloud.

9. Use your words

One of the ways to work constructively through confusion and potential conflict is to recognize that words mean different things to different people. In fact, Module 6 addresses how language matters greatly for this topic. The study includes a glossary of terms used in the modules. Be sure to point participants to this glossary on page 112, so they can refer to it to help define new concepts and understand ways that they are using vocabulary.

10. Create safe space

Providing appropriate care for the participants engaged in the study is very important. Not all participants will have the same knowledge or the same emotions about the topics related to women and justice. Some people will be encountering new ideas; some people may find some of the topics upsetting; still others may find that some of the topics or words in a module provoke deep anxiety or disturbance for them related to previous trauma. This occurrence is referred to as “triggering.” People whose prior experience of trauma is re-provoked can become physically uncomfortable to the point of having anxiety attacks or flashbacks of the past event.

As a leader, you will not be able to predict participants' responses. What you can do is to create as much safety as possible for individuals. Here are some useful guides:

- a. Encourage participants to review module content before participating and remind them ahead of time what the content of the next session is so that people can make choices about participation.
- b. If you know about trauma among members of your group, you could address this privately. For instance, you could talk to someone you know who is a survivor of assault or abuse in the group to help them decide about their participation in talking about violence in Module 5. Or, if they are forewarned, a survivor may choose to skip that session.
- c. More often, you may not know some of these deeply personal matters even though members have talked often together. In this case, it can be helpful to acknowledge with the group that topics about sexism can be personally challenging and may involve memories of trauma for some people. Remind participants that some of the people in the room are statistically likely to have experienced the issues the study addresses. Reassure participants that they do not need to share their personal experiences unless they choose to. Encourage all participants to speak sensitively, using I-statements, and not to make assumptions about other participants and their experiences.
- d. A useful exercise in certain settings can be to have all members write down on a piece of paper any specific topics that they think might be a “trigger” for someone. These papers should be handed in to you privately as leader. You must indicate that you will keep these confidential. The point is that

participants think about this together and that you are clear you are not asking individuals to identify themselves to you or anyone in the group. With such a list, you can use pastoral sensitivity whenever the conversation nears these topics. This is an important way to create a safe space for everyone. Make it as natural as possible.

11. Highlight the purpose of this process and urge participants or a designated member to complete the response forms

These are found either at the end of the print version or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjssoverall>. Encourage participants to use one of these options each week. Each response is read by several members of the task force or staff, and an overall report will be made available online after the close of the response period, August 31, 2017. In Module 1, you will find a summary of the way that participating in this study contributes to the larger mission of preparing a new social statement for the ELCA. Remind participants that this is a valuable opportunity to serve more than your own setting or congregation. The ELCA is all of us together.

12. Be a learner-leader and provide ways to Go Deeper

The best teachers never stop being curious learners themselves. Relish your privilege to lead this study as a way to educate yourself about matters concerning women and justice that surround us, as well as the faith that sustains us. In a sense you will become something of a local "expert" because you will be doing the preparations and introducing new material. Participants will expect that of you. But maintaining an attitude that participants' lives encompass "expertise" also adds a necessary level of respect and shared interaction. You can particularly serve those participants who are motivated to Go Deeper in their education by referring them to ELCA.org/womenandjustice for a wealth of additional resources.

LEADER'S PREPARATION GUIDE FOR EACH MODULE

MODULE 1: WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK TOGETHER?

Materials

- Handouts (see below)
- Pencils
- Paper
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 1, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Print out enough copies of this module's handout, found below.

- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.

The core of this module is the covenant for conversation. Please do not skip this or skimp on time. The covenant sets the framework for all additional conversations. Spend ample time doing the covenant-making exercise.

It is essential to think ahead as a leader of this module about how you can explain the importance of practices and attitudes that create a safe space for conversation. Good conversation always depends on safety in speaking and listening. Conversations about sexism can be especially delicate since personal identities and beliefs are so tightly woven into this conversation. Remember that many, many women and girls have negative personal experiences connected to what is being discussed here. In particular, read, or reread, the section in the Leader's Guide, Tip 10, above. As a leader take the time and make the space for welcome and safe conversations.

COVENANT GUIDELINES FOR CONVERSATION¹

Follow the Golden Rule. Remember “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” even when you disagree with others, maybe especially in that case.

Listen respectfully and carefully to others. This is your best way to begin to understand them and to keep the “public space” of this conversation safe for candid conversation. Listening helps bring out differences and helps to probe for shared values and positions. By listening carefully to others, you help build relationships of trust.

Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Honesty about your thoughts and feelings expresses respect for others. Personal thoughts, feelings, values and experiences are as legitimate a part of the conversation as factual information. Conversation can be quite passionate and still be respectful and civil.

Speak for yourself, only. You do not know exactly what anyone else in a group is thinking or feeling, even if you've known someone for a long time. Use “I-statements” rather than “you-statements.” Likewise, it is not fair to expect other conversation partners to represent a whole group. Remember that they are only speaking for themselves.

Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a particular perspective in your common discernment. But you won't hear that if you judge too quickly what is being said!

A true conversation needs give and take. Everyone should be encouraged to speak and to listen. Help keep the discussion focused by sticking to the subject at hand.

Maintain confidentiality about matters people share with the group when it is asked or obviously appropriate. Remember: If in doubt, do not share elsewhere. This helps to build and maintain trust.

Keep an open mind and heart. Try to understand others as much as possible from their point of view as they express it. Even those who disagree with you strongly may have new insights to ponder. Christ has broken down dividing walls of differences and hostilities (Ephesians 2:13-14).

Exercise care for group members, with a special concern for those who become upset over what is said during the conversation.

In a conversation of this kind, genuine listening is as important as, or more important than, talking.

Genuine listening is not a passive activity, but an active, demanding one. Listen not only for the content of what is said but for the way it is said – such as the tone, the kind and level of feeling expressed, the body language and facial expression. Also be attentive to what is not said. Being more conscious about this kind of deep listening will help each of us to hear and understand better what other people are saying.

The outcome, quality and safety of the conversation are everyone's responsibility.

¹ Adapted from “Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues,” (Chicago: Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999).

FOR CREATING A CONVERSATION COVENANT

God is calling us to talk together as God's people in a way that will allow us to share perspectives, receive new facts, come away with fresh insights, and consider what we might do together as God's people.

A group covenant exercise:

With God's help,

I will listen respectfully and carefully to others.

I will seek to recognize the Holy Spirit's presence here.

I will remember that I must speak only for myself.

I will maintain confidentiality.

I will keep an open mind and heart.

I will share responsibility for this sacred process.

I will keep in mind God's people whom we are serving.

Amen.

(Participants may turn to a neighbor and make the sign of the cross on their forehead and share a sign of Christ's peace.)

Looking ahead: What other modules could your group discuss?

Module 2: What problems do women face, and what does justice require?

Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?

Module 6: Why do images and words for God matter?

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

MODULE 2: WHAT PROBLEMS DO WOMEN FACE, AND WHAT DOES JUSTICE REQUIRE?

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 2, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.

MODULE 3: HOW IS SEXISM PERSONAL, AND HOW ARE WE THE BODY OF CHRIST TOGETHER?

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 3, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Pick a wall where you will create a cross.
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.

MODULE 4: WHAT DOES ECONOMIC SEXISM LOOK LIKE, AND HOW CAN WE SEEK EQUITY FOR ALL?

Materials

- Handouts
- Pencils
- Paper
- Markers
- Timer
- Craft clay
- Large paper
- Markers and maybe crayons (continued)

- Tape
- Whiteboard and markers
- M&Ms, if you will use this optional activity
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 4, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.
- Decide which of the reflection activities you will use and be sure you have the materials.
- Count out M&Ms in advance, if using this activity.

MODULE 5: HOW CAN WE ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 5, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.

MODULE 6: WHY DO WORDS AND IMAGES FOR GOD MATTER?

Materials

- Pencils
- Timer
- Whiteboard and markers
- Candle, if using this option
- Paper
- Technology to project the art slides, if available

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 6, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Identify the location of the art images at the end of the module or online.

- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.
- Review the images that you will show during this module. Make sure your technology works or have color copies ready.

A note about how to lead this session

The main focus of this session is to open up experiences and discussion on the diversity and complexity of Christian language and imagery for God. There are instructions on how many minutes to spend on each section, and you are encouraged to say at the beginning of the session that you will be mindful of the clock so that participants can get a taste of everything. Participants may choose to return at later times to discuss things they thought were interesting. Encourage them to keep track of topics to which return.

These are notes for the images in the session.

Image 1

"The Way of the Cross" by Ettore De Grazia is a contemporary piece. Notice how the gender and sex of Jesus Christ are not evident, but there is still clear reference to physical embodiment.

Image 2

At first glance Alexandre Hogue's painting appears not to include a body – until one remembers that Jesus was a human or "earth creature" (adam) formed of the earth (adamah), and then recognizes that this picture links the crucifixion of the one body of earth to the other. (See Genesis 2:7.)

Image 3

This is a mosaic of a mother hen, depicted at Dominus Flevit Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem.

Image 4

Here the resurrected Jesus Christ is depicted as an American Indian chief. Notice how many of the artists in the series have painted in such a way to see themselves in Jesus. Are there other ways that people appropriate sacred imagery in this way?

Image 5

How often have you seen Jesus depicted as the woman searching for the lost coin? Many churches have stained glass windows of Jesus as a shepherd. An ELCA congregation in Anna, Ohio, has this window!

Image 6

This piece has been named "Jesus on Cross;" it is in the Tatlarin Church in Goreme, Turkey. What is remarkable is that it is from the 11th century. It depicts Jesus Christ on the cross with a bleeding breast. Quite often, when women nurse babies, their nipples do bleed. Theologically, what is communicated in this image is that Jesus feeds and sustains the Church with flesh. In this image, the blood is coming from the breast, whereas in the next one, the blood is coming from the wound the Roman centurion made in Jesus' side.

Image 7

Five hundred years later, in a different part of the world, a similar message is given in this painting. "The Man of Sorrows," by Jacob Cornelisz, which he painted around 1510. Notice how the wound in Jesus' side is quite close to his breast and that he is cupping his hand under the wound in order to extract blood for the Eucharist. Women who nurse babies cup their hands in the same way under their breasts so that the milk flows freely to the baby about to latch on. This tenderness in the painting is remarkable. Theologically, just like the last painting, Jesus Christ is depicted as the one who feeds and sustains the Church through the flesh. For more, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Image 8

This is an illustration from a French Moralized Bible, 1240. One medieval scholar writes: "Using the inversion so common in medieval religious imagery, artists depicted Christ as a mother giving birth to Church on the cross, and drew a parallel to the birth of Eve from Adam's side" (Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 99). Notice that the baby (the Church) is being born out of Christ's wounded side.

Image 9

This sculpture is most likely from Cologne or the Upper Rhine Valley, Germany, sometime between 1000-1050. It is made of oak and is quite large, measuring at 128 x 90 x 18 cm. There are remnants of painting decoration, a blue robe to signify the incarnation and red blood. Formerly it was used as a custodial (a vessel to hold consecrated Eucharist wafers). The case in Jesus' chest was locked by a mountain crystal (German diamond). Both the relic and the crystal are lost today. It was found in an attic in Birkenbrinhausen in Hesse in the 1930s. Again, theologically, Jesus Christ is shown to be both the source of the Church and the sustainer of the Church.

Image 10

This painting also appears to depict Jesus Christ as pregnant, but rather than crucified, Christ is here seemingly in a tomb or womb prior to resurrection. It hangs above the altar of the house chapel in the Russian Bishop's House in Sitka, Alaska, the former seat of Russian Orthodoxy this side of the Pacific until 1969. Although this site is now part of the U.S. National Park system, the Chapel of the Annunciation is still a consecrated site. The painting is from perhaps mid-19th century.

MODULE 7: HOW DO WE CHALLENGE THE MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer
- Candle, if using this option

How to prepare

- Distribute copies of Module 7, pencils and paper to each participant.
- Decide ahead of time which of the devotional activities you wish to use. (See Devotional Options.)
- Invite one or two participants to read the Scripture.

Prayers and spiritual activities are critically important in setting the context for Christian conversation. They claim the biblical promise that wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, the Spirit will be present. They help create the appropriate "space" for study and sharing. This study offers two models and sets of material for opening and closing. Both have been used by the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ. Leaders can choose what is most fitting for the situation, which might vary from module to module. For each session, you may wish to light a candle symbolizing God's presence with us at all times and in all places.

OPTION 1: CENTERING PRAYER AND HEART PRAYER

Mindful breathing and centering prayer are Christian practices that will create a respectful space for groups to notice how God is present throughout your time of study. For closing, the Heart prayer (a modified ancient practice, often called *spiritual examen*) is used as a way to pray the prayers of our heart and minds that arise from study.

Opening centering prayer (5 minutes)

1. Introduce the practice of mindful breathing and centering prayer. The goal of such prayer is to emphasize openness to or awareness of the presence of God's Spirit in the immediate moment rather than to emphasize words spoken to God. Centering prayer builds on the practice of mindful breathing, in which a word or image is used to focus the attention away from distractions and help a person move deeper into a practice of intentional, quiet prayer. As you introduce the practice, you should also introduce the suggested centering word for the session (just below).
2. Use the following script as entry into the practice of mindful breathing and centering prayer. If you are already familiar with this practice, feel free to use words that are comfortable for you. It may be helpful to set a gentle timer for the time you are committing to this prayer practice. Once the timer sounds, invite the participants to slowly open their eyes and gently move arms and feet as they return to the present moment.

Script:

Leader: "Find a relaxed position ... gently close your eyes ... put both feet on the floor (as you are able) ... open your hands. Once you find a relaxed position take three normal breaths ... try to notice the complete cycle of your breath as it moves into and out of your body ... then, as you continue to notice your breath, we will move into a time of centering prayer ...

“With each breath lift up to God the centering word for this session ... today the word is [insert word here]

Module 1 – Listen

Module 5 – Healing

Module 2 – Justice

Module 6 – Spirit

Module 3 – Freedom

Module 7 – Hope

Module 4 – Companion

With each breath, repeat this word gently ... if your mind wanders, try to come back to the centering word ... if another word seems to work better for you, follow that word ... the only goal is to become aware of God's presence in this moment, following the inward and outward cycle of your breath ... continue breathing and praying until you hear the timer ... once you hear the timer, you can gently return your attention to the activity in this room.”

3. As an advance note, encourage members of the group to keep a list of things that arise from the conversation during the rest of the time together that may be places where we need to be in corporate prayer. Those notes may be shared in prayer at the end of the session.

In closing: heart prayer (5 minutes)

This is a way to practice noticing and reflecting on the prayers of the heart.

1. The leader may say these or similar words:

“Place your hand on your heart and both feet on the floor, as you are able, as a posture of prayer. Begin to think about the conversation in this session of the study. Before we move into a time of individual and quiet prayer, I invite you to share any things you have noticed that we should hold to God in corporate prayer that were part of our conversation today. [Leave silence for folks to share things they noted.]

“Now we move into a time of heart prayer. As your hand remains on your heart, I invite you into conversation with God.

“Notice something that is troubling to you, perhaps a place of lament, and hold that in prayer to God. [pause, silently count three breaths]

“Now, notice a place of freedom and hold that to God. [pause, silently count five breaths]

“Notice where you were pushed to grow and think about something in a new way. Hold that to God. [pause, silently count five breaths]

“Notice and name an indication of hope as you move forward in learning and growing. Hold that to God. [pause, silently count five breaths]

“All our prayers we offer to your transformative grace, O God. Amen.”

OPTION 2: PREPARED PRAYERS

Opening prayer (1 minute)

Module 1

Fountain of Wisdom, thank you for meeting us in the desert of our hearts. Help us notice the ways your wisdom gives life like water in a parched land. Open our hearts, minds and spirit to your teaching. Amen.

Module 2

My Rock, I surrender my heart to you. When my understanding of truth is shaken, root me in the solid rock of your justice. Amen.

Module 3

Weaver of All, thank you for the bold patterns of life. Give us courage to name our place in the conversation. Help us trust that it is all held by you. Amen.

Module 4

Creator God, free us from fear. Help us hear your invitation to abundant life. Empower us to pray, live and work on behalf of the neighbor in our homes, our jobs and in your creation. Amen.

Module 5

Most Faithful Companion, thank you for walking with us on our road. Help us notice you in the people who journey with us in this life. Sustain us for the work that waits. Amen.

Module 6

Most Gracious God, we call your name. We yearn to know you even as we are fully known. Comfort and nourish us through Jesus Christ. Sustain us by your Spirit. Amen.

Module 7

Loving Savior, Jesus Christ, come to us with your abundant grace. Work in our hearts and minds, freeing us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy. Strengthen us that we may willingly bear your redeeming love to all the world. This we pray in the name of the Triune God, who creates, redeems and sustains us. Amen.

(Note: This prayer is inspired by the Prayer of the Day for the Fourth Sunday of Advent of Lectionary Year B 2014/2015 using the Revised Common Lectionary as it appears in Evangelical Lutheran Worship (2006). It is repeated at the end of the module.)

Closing prayer (1 minute)

Module 1

Story Teller, feed our imagination. Open our ears to hear you in the story of the “other,” as we grow to recognize the neighbor’s story as our own. Amen.

Module 2

Restorer God, we are a broken people. Teach us to be co-creators in the work of peace and love for neighbor and self. We pray all those who feel unloved and broken will hear your voice and call on your holy name. Amen.

Module 3

Gardener of Grace, till the soil of our minds. Plant seeds of new ways of being deep within. Cultivate the garden of change. Amen.

Module 4

Compassionate Teacher, open our eyes. Help us notice when we fail to treat others as equals and participate in unjust systems of oppression. Forgive us and empower us to live and act from a heart of justice. Amen.

Module 5

Great Healer, we pray for courage and guidance. Heal us with your peace and make us new. Open the eyes of our heart to see you in the faces of victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Help us be with one another in precious places of healing. Give all strength for the journey. Amen.

Module 6

Seer of All, there is nowhere we can hide from your truth. Thank you for the gift of language, words and the ability to name truth. Higher than our human understanding, your promise of salvation sustains us with grace. Amen.

Module 7

Loving Savior, Jesus Christ, come to us with your abundant grace. Work in our hearts and minds, freeing us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy. Strengthen us that we may willingly bear your redeeming love to all the world. This we pray in the name of the Triune God, who creates, redeems and sustains us. Amen.



Why do we need to talk together?



OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

Welcome to a conversation about women and justice in church and society. Conversations involve two or more people talking together to share perspectives, learn information and analysis, listen to others' insights, and, in this case, consider how we as God's people might take action.

All conversations as God's people are rooted in prayer and oriented by Scripture as our book of faith; so before moving on, let's start there.

In our time together we will:

1. explore the reasons for talking about the issues of women and justice.
2. make a group covenant for our conversations.
3. talk about one of two key conversation points regarding women and justice.

Opening prayer* (See Devotional Options.)

Module objectives* (Review briefly.)

Scripture reading

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then Jesus began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Moment of silent reflection

I. WHAT BRINGS US HERE? (15 MINUTES)

Active and careful listening takes some practice and is central in this study; good conversations require good listening. This opening exercise helps explore the reasons our church is having a conversation about women and justice, but it also is a first chance to practice good listening.

Opening exercise:

**(Note to leaders, here is an aid for keeping the exercise on track.)*

- *1 minute: Invite participants to take a minute to think about or write down their answers to one of these two questions:*
 - *Why do I think we need to talk about the issues of women and justice?*
 - *Why did I come to this session today?*
- *3 minutes: Have participants pair up. Each person in the pair takes a moment to share their answer and then to listen carefully to their partner's answer.*
- *4 minutes: Each pair then joins another pair and "the listener" introduces to the others what their partner said.*
- *3 minutes: Gather everyone back together and ask for a sampling of reasons given for why we need to talk together about women and justice. Only "listeners" report to the group, with permission from their speaker partners, of course. On newsprint or a white board, write a few words to describe each reason given.)*

**(Note to leaders: Read aloud or summarize the following paragraphs. If pressed for time, read only the sections designated as must read with green shading.)*

What brings us here? There are many reasons for coming together to talk about the concerns of women and justice in church and society. You likely have heard quite a few of those in the opening exercise and can probably think of others.

One fundamental reason for Christians is the belief that God as creator makes all people with dignity, and so our church (the ELCA) is committed to the full and equitable participation of all people in church and society. Yet, for example, women and girls as a group experience tragically high rates of physical and sexual abuse, as well as economic disparities in income and opportunities. Many people point to the personal and systemic sin of **SEXISM** as what leads to oppression and marginalization. (Throughout this study, terms identified in capitalized bold will be found in the glossary.) While there have been significant advancements in the last 100 years within both church and society, we need to talk because many problems remain.

Jesus' announcement in Luke about his purpose, just above, also compels us to talk about all of this, too. He tells his listeners that his mission is to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. What does this mean today regarding women and justice? It is through talking together that the Holy Spirit can help us understand what participation in Jesus' ongoing ministry means for us as individuals and for our families, our work or school situation, our congregation, our synod and for the whole ELCA in fact!

In addition, there is a formal reason for this sustained conversation across our church at this particular time. The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized that "the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America develop a social statement on the topic of justice for women in church and society."

Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?

For many reasons, the start of the statement process was delayed for several years. The ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ has been at work, however, since late 2012. The task force's work will result in a proposed social statement to be considered at the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

That assembly – the ELCA's highest legislative body – received motions from four synods and from other sources calling for the development of a social statement. Those who urged it and those who voted for its development believed the ELCA needed to initiate a broad and sustained conversation that could lead to a statement with official teaching and policy related to sexism.

When adopted, a social statement does not dictate what ELCA members “have to believe” but does present our church's fullest understanding of Scripture and contemporary knowledge to assist members to reach informed judgments from a faith perspective and to take action.

Since 2012, the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ has been hard at work. Members of the task force have been present for or received reports from nearly 100 listening events to learn what concerns are on the hearts and minds of members. During nine weekend meetings, the task force also has heard presentations from more than two dozen specialists to help it understand the issues. (Learn more about the members and the work of the task force at ELCA.org/womenandjustice.)

The conversation within the task force about women and justice in church and society has been lively and has opened up questions, new understanding of needs and new insights. Through this study that begins with this module, the task force is now inviting every member, and others, to participate in conversation and engage the issues.

II. HOW SHALL WE TALK TOGETHER? (20 MINUTES)

Conversation in community about social and political issues is not necessarily easy. This is especially the case today since we live in a time of polarization and uncivil discourse. While we may say, “They will know we are Christians by our love,” it can be rough and rewarding, scary and eye-opening – all at the same time – to talk together. That is just a fact when people participate in the process of conversation in a Christian community. Fortunately, there are well-tested ways to create a safe and productive space for talking together.

First and foremost for our conversations, it is important to recognize that our unity in Christ is a gift of God. It is not the result of agreeing about everything we discuss, even deeply held ethical convictions. This gift of unity is not the same thing as uniformity, and it is not our doing; it is given to us in our common baptism into Christ. This gift of unity calls us forward in the Spirit to seek relationships of “mutual conversation and consolation.”¹ (See *Going Deeper* for Module 1 for more.) Such relationships are essential for any genuine conversation. In conversations in which we try to discern what is good and right (Romans 12:1-2), we depend first upon the

church's unity in Christ because we all see through a mirror dimly, and all of us must rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance, which is given within the community.

While depending on that unity, it is clear that lively and constructive conversations require creating safe spaces to talk. Safe conversation requires using good conversation practices, and it requires common commitment to use those. One of the ways to create a safe space is to make a covenant for conversation.

The biblical idea of covenant has a much deeper meaning than a "contract." The Bible shows how God relates to the world through enduring covenantal promises. Human beings can reflect God's way by giving and receiving promises in human associations that recognize the presence of the divine in their midst. In short, being accountable both to one another and to God is what covenants are about. Talking together as Christians about tough social questions, then, goes best when those involved agree to a covenant for conversation.

A conversation covenant exercise

**(Note to leaders: Make sure everyone has a handout. Begin the conversation covenant exercise by reading these words:*

Others before us have found ways to create a conversation covenant and developed guidelines that honor our faith and participation. On your handout, you will find one such resource called Covenant Guidelines for Faithful Conversations.

Create three or more break-out groups and assign each group some of the 10 guidelines to talk about for five minutes using the following questions. Be sure that each guideline is assigned to at least one group.

- 1. What stands out to you in the guidelines you have read?*
- 2. Have you ever been part of a group that did not abide by that guideline? What happened? (If no one in the small group has had that experience, talk about what might happen if a group didn't keep that guideline.)*

Call the whole group back together. Spend 10 minutes inviting each group to introduce the guidelines they discussed. (Emphasize the practice of speaking using "I-statements," of keeping an open heart, and of maintaining confidentiality.) Make sure the point is made that these guidelines are necessary for safe and constructive conversations that express God's love for all people. Ask for any additions.

Restate the purpose of this covenant-making and these guidelines; then ask participants if they are ready to share a ritual that proclaims God's action in our conversations.

Think about it: Note how many covenants God makes in the Bible! For example: with Noah's family (Genesis 9:13), Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12:1-3), the Hebrew people at Mount Sinai in giving the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20), King David (2 Samuel 7), and the new covenant in Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28).

Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?

Have participants turn to the ritual on the handout. Invite everyone to stand as they are able and read the commitments aloud together. If comfortable in your setting, invite participants to end the ritual by turning to the person next to them and marking their forehead with the sign of the cross.)

III. WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN? (12 MINUTES)

With a covenant in place, here are two significant points for conversation that have become important for the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ as they consider the concerns around women and justice. Other modules in this study will open up conversations about all of these ideas, and the task force expects that there will be different views as part of lively discussion. That is good.

**(Note to leaders: Given time constraints, a group probably can only discuss one of the conversation points if you have a setting in which it is difficult to divide into two groups. If time permits, you can do otherwise, but it's okay if not everyone discusses both ideas; the ideas will show up in other modules, too. Stress that the point is not to get everyone to agree during the conversation, but it is to give everyone a chance to consider ideas thoughtfully, share perspectives safely, and come away with new insights for thought and action.*

If you have a larger group, divide into groups of five or six, a size that fosters contributions by each participant. Assign each of the groups to one of the two conversation points:

- *Our conversation is about making the connections.*
- *Our conversation is about a neighbor-justice reading of Scripture.*

Groups spend three to four minutes reading the opening paragraph and then sharing brief answers to the opening question. Be sure to keep track of time for everyone. For the remaining minutes, groups read at least the paragraphs in green shading, if not all of the remaining text, and share responses in a conversation format.)

Our conversation is about making the connections.

In some recent movies (for example, "The Hunger Games," "Suffragette," "Selma" or "Spotlight") the people involved come to understand that there is something more than just the choices of individuals at work causing incidents of suffering. The characters come to recognize the existence of "systems" that run deep and broad. They experience these forces as powerful, enduring and pervasive, greater than any one individual, group, community or even government. They also realize that systems can be changed, even though it is extremely difficult.

Question for sharing:

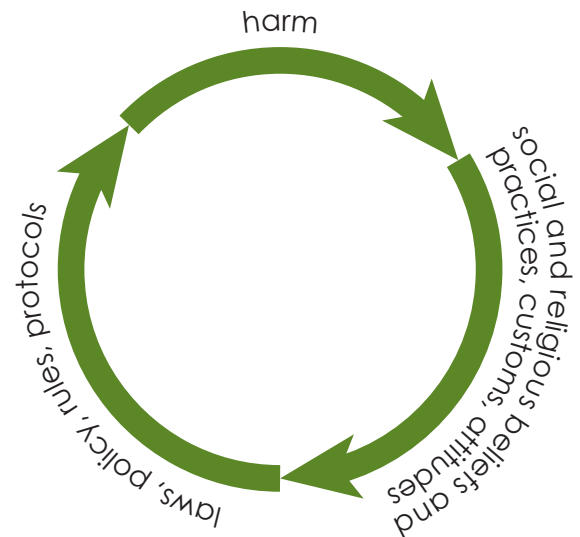
When have you experienced the effect of a "system," that is, felt the effect of a combination of factors and actors that was bigger than any individual's action, yet had a very real effect on you?

As discussed in the question just above, many of us have had such an experience with a system. Most people can identify a time when we experienced troubles that were not caused by a single individual or even group of people, and we felt the power of “the system.” We experienced at least inconvenience, if not outright harm, as a result of the combination of power in individuals’ actions, policies, laws, attitudes and words. The harm or loss was real even if there was no physical attack or single “cause.” Surprisingly, in those cases we even may have been ourselves a participant in this system and yet were still harmed by it!

An essential way to explain the experiences of women and girls in society – though it affects everyone – is by thinking of systems. It is difficult to accurately portray “systemic realities” because they are complicated and dynamic, rather than two-dimensional. Still, it may help to let a graphic illustrate how there are connections.

We are troubled when we hear that a woman is raped or a girl struggles with body image. Most of us are dissatisfied when we learn that women, especially women of color, earn less than men for the same work, or that individuals are demeaned by words or actions because of their sex, gender, economic status, skin color or cultural background. These incidents of harm, loss, coercion or cruelty are represented by the curved line near the top. It is fairly easy to think about all of this harm, though, as if it were not connected to the other two lines.

The diagram, however, shows the connections. Harm is set in motion by the other curved lines. There is the curved line that represents the effects of social and religious beliefs and practices, often as customs and habits. The third curved line represents the contribution of laws, policy directives, or other forms of practical application. Individuals or groups of actors may or may not realize they are guided by these systemic forces, but individuals don’t make choices in a vacuum. Individuals are influenced by beliefs and customs and act according to laws and protocols. To use just one illustration, the best way to explain why 1 in 4 women will be raped in their lifetime is because certain social beliefs and practices, laws and applications of the law permit or encourage men to exercise power in this way.



It can be difficult to talk about, let alone grasp that there is a system or set of powerful invisible “forces” that connect to or set in motion individual incidents. It can be quite a challenge to accept that individual incidents involve multiple causes of: a) personal responsibility and b) social and religious beliefs and c) policy, laws, rules or common practices. Yet, if you step back, it becomes clear that something more than individual choices is needed to explain what’s going on in our society. To be a human being is to be in relationships, and the three curved lines represent the forces that connect every individual in the many layered features of life that show up in the individual incidents and data we hear about in the news. The diagram can’t do justice to the complexity of the situation, but it illustrates this central point.

Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?

This is what the task force has come to realize; that is, the members believe there are systemic connections in U.S. culture that harm women in many ways. It is only when these many connections are recognized that one can explain the whole story adequately. Some of the concepts used in this study to describe these forces or systems include **SEXISM**, **PATRIARCHY**, and sexual and gender harassment. (Throughout this study, terms identified in capitalized bold will be found in the glossary.) It is important to stress that everyone, men and women, participates in and is affected by these and can contribute to them.

The diagram, however, also suggests how change can come about. Just as individuals get caught up in the harmful cycle pictured here, enough individuals can break the systemic outcome and can bring about change. Individuals can reject or challenge harmful social and religious belief. When enough individuals stand together, beneficial laws can be created and policy can be enforced. When these happen, incidents of harm are reduced dramatically. Systems are powerful, but they can be changed.

Other modules in this study will open up conversations about all of these ideas, and the task force expects that there will be different views about how to create that change as part of lively discussion. That is good.

Our conversation is about the neighbor-justice reading of Scripture.²

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40)

Question for sharing:

When you hear "love your neighbor as yourself," name at least one way you think this commandment is connected with the biblical theme of justice.

As Christians, our faith is deeply rooted in God's Word of faithfulness revealed in the Bible. God's faithfulness seeks us out through the proclamation of good news of God's salvation. This salvation comes as a gift for each of us and is available to all people in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God's faithfulness also appears to the eyes of faith in the divine activity of good and just demands (God's law) that address the obligations we have in the world.³ This connection is made clear in Matthew 22:36-40.

Lutherans believe that the command to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength⁴ is truly fulfilled for us only through faith on account of Christ alone. We simply do not love God as we should, but God accepts us for Christ's sake by grace. Notice, though, how Jesus connects that first commandment with a second and familiar one: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

What is not so familiar is the next phrase that Jesus uses: "on these depend the law and the prophets." The Greek word translated as "depend" literally means "*hang*." Jesus is teaching his followers to hang all the other passages of the Bible on these two commandments.

What does this mean for our actions in relation to doing justice? It is as if Jesus is saying: "Look at all of the law and the prophets in light of the need of the neighbor." Lutherans don't believe we can bring in God's reign of justice, but we do believe God's grace liberates us, brings us together in Christ and sends us to work together for the sake of the neighbor who needs justice, peace and reconciliation now. (For more about justice, see Module 2.)

This idea can be used like a pair of eyeglasses to focus on the question: "How does this particular passage of the Bible enhance love for God and direct us toward love and justice for the neighbor?" In focusing this question on scriptural passages, the Spirit can open our understanding. The task force has dubbed these "neighbor-justice eyeglasses." To be clear, these are not the only eyeglasses with which we can read Scripture passages, but they are critical to use.

This neighbor-justice approach to reading the Bible puts into action two ideas from Lutheran thought: 1) The Bible contains both law (demand) and gospel (promise) and 2) the central importance of seeking the neighbor's good. They come together in that Lutherans have always insisted that a single biblical story or passage can offer a promise (good news), provide guidance for life and reveal our failures to live up to God's hope for us (law), all at the same time!

A neighbor-justice reading of the Bible compels us to ask: Who is the neighbor in the text? And, where do we hear about the need for justice in the passage? These questions lead us in turn to ask: What does that passage mean for our contemporary social and church situation? (This is a form of the good Lutheran question: What does this mean, for us?) It's as if the Bible is turning the question back on us. For example, when thinking about aspects of sexism such as gender and sex discrimination in the workplace we are asked: Who is your neighbor at work and in your community? And how can you seek economic justice for the neighbor at your place of employment or church or in your vocation?

Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?

God's faithfulness, love and justice are encountered in a neighbor-justice reading of Scripture. Such a reading challenges the way that sexism harms women and girls especially, but men and boys too. This neighbor-justice reading encourages Christians to worship, live and work in ways that empower all people to live out the fullness of their callings in society. (These callings include, for example, carrying out God's work as citizens, parents, students, workers and many others!)

IN CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should gather the group and read the following summary, guide the closing prayer and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

This study on women and justice is framed by the idea that God is calling us to talk together as God's people. While there have been major changes in church and society, women and girls still are harmed, devalued and oppressed, often as individuals and as a group. For the sake of this conversation you have been invited to covenant around guidelines for talking together. Two initial conversation points in this module were about systemic connections of sexism and about neighbor-justice eyeglasses for reading Scripture. Welcome to the conversation and to actions that grow from it!

Closing prayer **(See "Devotional options.")*

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 123 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss1> and send it to the task force.
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper**, found below or online.
3. Take time to **think about what Scripture says about justice**. (See the end of Going Deeper for a list of biblical passages.)
4. Take time to **look at the other modules in this study**.
5. **Throughout the week ahead, notice where there is a need** for practices of neighbor justice around sexism and ask the questions: What is my prayer right there? What action should I take?

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 1

If you want to know more about ELCA social statements: ELCA social statements are one of three kinds of social teaching and policy documents of our church that guide communal and personal moral formation, discernment and action. Social statements assist members in forming judgments on social issues as frameworks for addressing the major issues in contemporary life. They do so by bringing Scripture and Lutheran theology into dialogue with social analysis on a particular social question. Social statements also set policy for this church and guide its advocacy and work as a public church. They result from an extensive process of deliberation during their development and require two-thirds vote of a churchwide assembly for adoption.

ELCA members are encouraged to use social statements for teaching and moral guidance. Since they state the official position of this church and govern church policy, the statements guide advocacy and the public statements of church leaders. They also aid members in moral formation and in their roles as citizens or in their various callings in life. Members are not required to hold convictions identical to those in the ELCA's teaching documents, but these documents do provide a sound framework for discussion and moral deliberation.

(To read social statements or to learn more, visit ELCA.org/socialstatements.)

If you want to know more about a “neighbor-justice reading” of the Bible:

Lutherans, among others, teach that the Bible is *the* source revealing to us God's faithfulness, and therefore we read the Bible as *the* book of faith, as the normative source that guides our beliefs and actions. The ELCA's Book of Faith emphasis suggests four primary ways to read the Bible: *devotional, historical, literary and Lutheran-theological*.⁵ (For a resource on applying these further to Scripture, visit ELCA.org/womenandjustice.) Reading the Bible with these ways in mind helps readers understand the different themes and riches it contains. These four ways also aid the “neighbor-justice reading” as can be illustrated by examining two of them.

For instance, when discussing issues of sex and gender from a neighbor-justice perspective, it is especially important to recognize the *historical* settings of the Old and New Testaments. In reading the Bible historically, it is critical to understand the particular social and cultural context that influenced the content and message. Today's context and knowledge about biology, psychology, sex and gender are dramatically different than those of the biblical authors and the social contexts that influenced them. Many of the biblical books, for instance, assume that males are smarter and stronger than females, that males should be the head of the household, and that the primary responsibility of women is to bear children and contribute to the household economy. We know today that God's creation is much more dynamic, complex and diverse than those assumptions.

Two critical theological elements of the *Lutheran-theological* way of reading Scripture contribute significantly when we put on “neighbor-justice eyeglasses.” Examples from Martin Luther's thought illustrate these.

Throughout this study you will be invited to use the “eyeglasses” of “neighbor justice” when reading Scripture.

1. The Bible expresses both **law and gospel**; that is, both demand and promise come through, often in the same verses!
2. God's love reorients us to seek the well-being of “the neighbor,” who by definition is anyone in need.⁶

When Luther taught people how to read and interpret the Bible, he insisted that both law and gospel are communicated throughout every book. In terms of our standing before God, one Lutheran Bible scholar describes it this way: “The Bible functions as law when it causes us to fear God, and it functions as gospel when it causes us to love God.”⁷ The point is that the same verse may provide a promise to one hearer (gospel) while calling another to acknowledge how they fail to live up to God’s will for them (law).⁸

For example, the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) offers the promise that God sees and comforts those who are harmed or in distress and cares for them through the hands of others. At the same time, the parable exposes how we often “walk by” Jesus’ call for justice and fail to fulfill our obligation to care for our neighbor.

Lutherans have consistently taught that the measure of our choices, actions and beliefs should be the well-being of the neighbor. Luther, for instance, in “The Freedom of a Christian,” wrote, “I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me. I will do nothing in this life except what is profitable, necessary, and life-giving for my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.” This is the freedom that comes with faith!

This same freedom is attested to in Scripture, and this freedom calls us to seek out justice for the neighbor and for ourselves. Employing a neighbor-justice reading of the Bible empowers us to draw upon the biblical themes of creativity and mutuality so that all people can live in dignity, do justice, love kindness, walk humbly and live as one in Christ. When we use a neighbor-justice lens to encounter the biblical text, we not only see the individual needs of the neighbor, but we come to recognize that well-being requires social, legal and economic approaches that establish justice for the neighbor in our homes, churches, places of employment, communities and the world.

If you want to read some key passages in the Bible about neighbor justice, here are some to turn to: One of the most well-known is “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) Others include Deuteronomy 10: 17-18; Amos 5:21-24; Zechariah 7:9-10; Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 11:42, Philippians 4:10; Hebrews 11:33.

ENDNOTES

¹ Luther marks “mutual conversation and consolation” in the Smalcald Articles as one of the ways in which we experience the gospel. The whole Christian community shares in the responsibility of praying for each other and of discussing and teaching and learning together. See Martin Luther, “Smalcald Articles Part III, Article iv,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 319.

² For more about the neighbor-justice reading, look at Going Deeper for Module 1.

³ The ELCA social statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* illustrates these points. (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 1, 4.

⁴ Mark 12:28-31 adds “strength” to the heart, soul and mind mentioned in Matthew 22:36-40.

⁵ The Book of Faith website has many resources for further exploration of these lenses: bookoffaith.org.

⁶ When Martin Luther comments on who the neighbor is he writes: “Now our neighbor is any human being, especially one who needs our help, as Christ interprets it in Luke 10:30–37.” Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians,” 1535, LW 26:57.

⁷ Mark Allan Powell, “Law & Gospel: Both Necessary,” *The Lutheran*, March 2009.

⁸ Luther writes, “Every word of God terrifies and comforts us, hurts and heals; it breaks down and builds up; it plucks up and plants again; it humbles and exalts.” Martin Luther, “An Exposition on the Lord’s Prayer,” 1519, LW 37:37.

⁹ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, translated by Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 82. See also Martin Luther, “The Sermon on the Mount,” 1538, LW 21:37.

2

What problems do women face, and what does justice require?



OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

Welcome! In this conversation we will explore more deeply both systemic problems and what justice might mean as a response to them. This conversation also takes up the hope and call to action that Christians cherish in light of God's promise of a new creation.

Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its
people as a delight. (Isaiah 65:18)

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn
assemblies. ... Take away from me the noise of your harps. But let
justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing
stream. (Amos 5:21-24)

Moment of silent reflection

I: WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WOMEN CONFRONT? (20 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Divide participants into small groups. Each group will read one of the following illustrations and use one or more of the questions as conversation starters.)*

What illustrates the problems?

Conversation starter questions:

1. Does this illustration surprise you? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the problem is in the case study you read?
3. What message does the case study you read tell you about social views of women's and girls' bodies?
4. Discuss any ways you see the personal experience in your case study being an instance of injustice or not.

In our time together we will:

1. look at some of the injustices suffered by women and girls in our society and church.
2. investigate characteristics of justice as a biblical and social value.
3. encounter the basis for a Lutheran theology grounded in hope.

Illustration 1: Marny and the high school dress code¹

"The dress code is unfairly enforced in my school. My friend was sent home because she violated the dress code. An administrator said her T-shirt was inappropriate and her shorts were too tight. Meanwhile the boys wear jeans below their waist, and once in a while you can see their 'butt cracks.' Jocks sometimes go shirtless or wear revealing shorts, and no one says anything. The administrators don't enforce the code equally, since boys are rarely sent home. Geeks (like myself), ethnic looking girls (like my friend who was sent home), 'plain looking' girls, and 'big girls' are singled out by administrators. This is not fair."

Illustration 2: June's pregnancy²

June and her husband were expecting their first child. At a party with friends, she could not help but share her anxieties about the impending birth. June felt anxious about the delivery and sought reassurance about how to deal with the pain associated with birthing, without having to resort to pharmaceuticals or epidurals. A well-intentioned friend commented, "Giving birth will come naturally to you as a woman since it is something women are designed to do. Your partner, on the other hand, has one important role to perform: to protect you and to provide for the baby once she/he is born."

Illustration 3: Hallie³

"As a college-aged student and member of the LGBTQ community who identifies as a lesbian, I am constantly asked why I am a lesbian. My mother frequently comments that I cannot be a lesbian because I am a female. My father says it is a phase, and that all I need to find is a good man. Guys at school make comments such as, 'You're too cute to be a lesbian.' Or, 'Would you and your girlfriend be up for a three-some?' Some men have even commented that a night with them will make me change my mind about liking women."

What is the root problem?

**(Note to leaders: Gather into the large group. Read the following information aloud.)*

Although there are many directions that conversation could take regarding the three illustrations we just discussed, we will concentrate on one central concern, the lived experience and needs of women.

These illustrations from women's real experiences suggest a big picture question: What is the root of female gender oppression? To many people who investigate these issues carefully, it is clear that what happens to individuals is just a symptom of a larger and more complicated problem. While the consequences of gender-based injustice are clear, they are informed by a harder-to-see sin in our social system: the problem of **PATRIARCHY**. But what is that?

Module 2: What problems do women face, and what does justice require?

(Note to leaders: Invite participants to pair off for the following activities.) In **one minute or less, circle words or phrases in the definition below that stand out to you or strike you in some way.*

A patriarchal **SOCIAL SYSTEM** is dominated largely by the voice and authority of men. 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. Patriarchy is supported through means of power and control, such as sexual discrimination and gender inequality.

In *one minute each*, share your response with your partner: Why did you circle what you did? When the signal is given, move to the next question:

- In one minute, identify an experience or observation from your life that matches an element of this definition of patriarchy.
- Take two minutes each to share your experience or observation with your partner.

How does a social system work? Thinking about our families can help since they are an example of a micro-social system. They shape us as individuals, even as we as individuals shape families.

Working in groups of two, identify and share an example of a common and expected behavior in your family of origin, either “good” or “not so good.” Use examples you are comfortable sharing with everyone. (2 minutes)

Family supported behavior	How was behavior reinforced or supported?	What were the consequences for NOT following along?

Discuss:

- What do you notice about the way a social system works to keep people acting in certain ways?

How does patriarchy get expressed in a social system?

**(Note to leaders: Divide participants into groups of five or six and ask each group to read one of the following. Have them circle words that stand out and then share responses within the small group.)*

(1) Where do gender and sexual identity come from?

Some people believe that **GENDER** is determined by our biology. They conclude that our gender and sexual attraction is either male or female and completely determined at birth. Others believe that gender is a completely social construct. Still others believe the reality is some combination of the two. Those who believe there is some degree of social construction point out that in our society the human body is sexualized by economic or market forces that are then socially reinforced. These definitions of gender—whatever their biological and social combination—function to encourage and, sometimes, to intimidate individuals into conforming **NORMATIVELY** to ethical standards of gender. Given market forces and social pressure, many people who study these matters argue that norms enforced by patriarchy are often unfair to women and **GENDER NON-CONFORMING** people. (See Module 3 for more on this.)

(2) What are some of the injustices faced by women?

Statistics show that women experience **INJUSTICE** as a common problem in such arenas as the workplace, the family and society. Economic social justice⁴ as one crucial form of justice is concerned with the problem of how society equitably distributes economic and social goods and burdens. Many see a connection between the root problem of patriarchy and the inequitable distribution of income and wealth experienced by women. Other forms of injustice connected to patriarchy include gender-based discrimination, objectification and stereotyping. Many people also believe that patriarchy in our society is associated with the loss of reproductive freedom, gender-based violence, or language practices. (See Modules 3-6 in this study for more on some of these.)

(3) In what way has the church perpetuated the sin of sexism and legitimated patriarchy?

The church is not exempt from the distorted power structure promoted by patriarchy. Many people point out how the church has also been responsible for sexist attitudes, as evident in debates on women's ordination. It is clear that the cultural systems of biblical times were highly patriarchal and those cultural aspects infected the teachings of the church. The suppression of women in the church often relies on particular interpretations of the Bible and on some of the theology of the early church.

For example, even though Scripture makes it clear that God does not have sex or gender, that is, is not male or female, the church has had a male-centered theology. This theology emphasizes an image and symbol of God as male and rarely appeals to the female metaphors in the Bible. Furthermore, patriarchal doctrines of God as male emphasize power, dominion and hierarchy. Many people believe these feed into practices and structures in the church that support and reinforce racism, sexism, poverty and fears about gays, transgendered people and others. (See Modules 6 and 7 for more on this.)

II. HOW ARE THESE PROBLEMS RELATED TO JUSTICE? (15 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Gather the whole group and have individuals read aloud the following sections. If time is short, use only the "must read" passages. Invite participants to circle key words and underline key passages that caught their attention. After the passages are read, invite individuals to share those key words and write them on newsprint. In this way the group can see and discuss these ideas that caught their attention.)*

Whatever one's view about the depth and connections of the problems experienced by women in church and society, remedies must be focused on seeking justice. It obviously is important, then, to sketch what **JUSTICE** means and explore a bit about what our church teaches about it. We also will explore what is often overlooked, the relationship between justice and oppression.

Does justice matter?

Justice is one of the most important biblical values in the Old Testament, referenced over 200 times! The prophet Amos, whom we read at the beginning of this module, saw justice as an important ideal for the faithful. In the New Testament, the Greek word for justice appears more than 90 times. Christian theology, many other religions and most secular thinking consider justice necessary for the healthy operation of any human society. Justice matters!

What are the characteristics of justice?

For the purpose of this study, we will define justice as an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment and reciprocity.

Previous ELCA social statements identified four guiding principles concerning justice: We will use these to guide our discussion of social justice for women. (For more about other aspects of justice, see Going Deeper for this module.)

sufficiency: meeting the basic needs of all people

sustainability: maintaining an acceptable quality of life for all generations

solidarity: the interdependence of all of creation

participation: the right of all people to have a voice regarding activities and decisions that affect their lives

**(Note to leaders: Divide your group into four and assign each one of the principles. Give each group about five minutes to read their principle, discuss what it means and think of examples where that principle is being applied in society and where more needs to be done. Then re-gather the group and invite members to share and talk about what they have discussed.)*

Sufficiency

The principle of sufficiency advocates for our society to address the basic needs (physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual) of women. As implied in the Golden Rule, there is a right of every person to life, self-actualization, dignity and respect. These encourage the concern for a women's right to be safe from gender-based violence and the right to equal opportunity in education and employment. The concern for sufficiency supports not only acknowledgement and respect but also advocacy for women in matters of health care, immigration, domestic violence, sexual expression, human trafficking and the workplace. Sufficiency as a principle of justice means the basic needs of all women and those who depend on them should be met.

Sustainability

The principle of sustainability compels society to provide an acceptable quality of life for all generations of women. Although this principle applies to emotional and material aspects of life, we will focus the discussion here on the intersectionality of gender, class and economy. On the one hand, women in our society are too often relegated to menial work and lower-paying jobs with little or no opportunity for promotion, advancement and leadership. This is especially evident among women of color. Further, the work of homemakers is undervalued and dismissed and often disrespected. Women who are economically vulnerable, who are forced to seek public assistance or welfare for the support of their family, are marginalized even further. They can be forced into dependency

Think about it:

"If you want to live in a community, you must share the community's burdens, dangers, and injuries, even though not you, but your neighbor has caused them. You must do this in the same way that you enjoy the peace, profit, protection, wealth, freedom, and security of the community, even though you have not won them or brought them into being."

Martin Luther,
(LW 46:78)]

through their subjection to an arbitrary and invasive bureaucracy and suffer a loss of rights including privacy, respect and choice as they navigate the process.

Solidarity

The principle of solidarity compels respect for the lived experience of women and encourages all people to share not only in their suffering but also to participate in their liberation. This liberation affects all people of whatever sex or gender. Sexism harms not just women but also men by celebrating rigid understandings of male roles, sometimes described as “hyper-masculine.” This hyper-masculine and narrow mentality targets gender-nonconforming men and women for discrimination and harassment. It also harms heterosexual males by discouraging them from forming meaningful relationships with men, women or LGBTQ people. The principle of solidarity encourages an end to women’s oppression and would benefit us all.

Participation

The principle of participation advocates for women to participate actively in the decisions that affect their lives. It should be no surprise that many women have little or no power in their household, workplace and elsewhere. This influences what decisions are made on matters that affect them. For example, in matters of sexual expression and reproduction, the range of decisions available to women about their bodies is generally determined by men (for example, legislatures with a majority of male representatives). In our society, a paternalistic attitude undermines the moral and legal agency of women.

How are we to deal with injustice?

Considering the gravity and enormity of the problem of injustice to women, what can we hope to accomplish? Ideally, we would have a society in which everyone is treated equally, in which each individual, family, community and nation lives in harmony and in which violence in all forms is non-existent. But sin – individual sin and the sinful systems in which we participate – undermines this ideal.

Nevertheless, Christians believe that God is at work in society to bring greater justice, and we are called to be God’s hands in doing the same. That means society should strive to respect the needs, rights and responsibilities of all people. These include equality of access in many matters, such as health care, personal safety, public and ecclesial leadership, education and financial well-being. Over the long-term, these changes must be structural and substantive, not cosmetic and superficial. Changes are needed in mindsets that oppress women and in institutions that foster and promote sexism.

While full justice may not be possible because of sin (a very Lutheran view), the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity and participation insist that there should be a common concern for justice. Sin is the ultimate problem and can lead to despair, but we serve a God of promise and justice.

III. A GOD OF PROMISE (10 MINUTES)

*(Note to leaders: Invite participants to work in pairs. Assign pairs to read at least one of the five components below silently and to discuss the following questions briefly. In the final few minutes, invite sharing from the pairs with the whole group.)

Questions for discussion:

- Where do you see or hear this component of hope in your congregation or your life?
- Name one way this component applies to the problems of women and justice.

While the church's past teaching contributes to today's problems, it also contains resources to draw upon. A *Lutheran theology grounded in hope* is a key example. We will examine five components of this Lutheran theology of hope that can empower us to respond to the suffering of all people. All five of these components are prophetic declarations of solidarity and community to strive toward a common good.

The **first** component of a theology grounded in hope is *reliance on the promises of God*. Isaiah 65, cited above, reminds us of God's great promise of a new creation, one in which the current order passes away and the much-anticipated reign of God is ushered in. This reign became real in Jesus as a promise but is not fully realized. The promised reign is a vision or assurance of God's future that encourages us to yearn for harmony and justice now, even if it is anticipatory and partial.

Secondly, as people of the promise, we are *embodiments of a community* living out a vision of hope that challenges the destructive patterns and ideologies that surround us. As a living embodiment of hope, we are not to tolerate the destructive beliefs and practices that belittle, demean and degrade women and girls.

Thirdly, when we receive the sacraments, we are reminded of God's *ongoing creative work*. This is expressed in baptism through which we are sealed and marked with the promise of the cross forever. Through the Eucharist we are reminded that we are partaking in an anticipatory meal that celebrates the new creation promised by Isaiah. The sacraments stand in stark contrast to the sexism and patriarchy that surrounds us since Christ is truly present among us.

The **fourth** component of the promise is the realization that in being sealed and marked by God in baptism, and in partaking of the Eucharist, a powerful *unitive bond* is created that challenges boundaries of gender, race, nationality, class or social status. This means that we are connected one to another as we strive for dignity, respect and justice for all people.

The **fifth** and final component is a corollary to the fourth one. Living as a community of promise with shared concerns allows us to live in *right relationship*, not only with God but with all of those who are our neighbors. This allows us to live

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out responsibly the ethical demands of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity and participation. Right relationship with God gives us power to challenge collective, sinful and divisive proclivities to injustice.

The Christian message of hope presents us an assurance of a future that in faithful commitment to one another seeks to envision, create, share and celebrate a society that is just and respects all people regardless of difference. We must be honest with ourselves and recognize that the struggle is not easy, that change will not occur overnight. Regardless, we know that God's promises will not fail, that change is possible, and that Christians are free in God's love to take active roles in changing our society for the better. The Bible is clear; God is a God of justice who desires that *"justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"* (Amos 5:21-24).

IN CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should gather the group and read the following summary, guide the closing prayer, and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

Our conversation today has explored a number of issues that reflect challenges women and girls face in the home, society and the church. The problems run deep, but God's promise of a new creation runs deeper and calls the Christian community to yearn for and act for change. A better understanding of justice as a response to oppression is an important start for seeking remedies.

Closing prayer **(See Devotional Options.)*

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** (found on page 125 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss2>).
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper** found below.
3. **This week notice** places where there is a need for practices of neighbor justice around sexism and ask the questions: What is my prayer right there? What action should I take on behalf of the neighbor?
4. **Learn and reflect:** Watch your local evening news and make a note of the number of stories about sexual harassment, economic issues related to women, instances of gender-based violence, the hardships faced by undocumented immigrant women, or women who are suppressed or

exploited. After a week of observation, discuss your findings with one of the participants of the study. What did you discover?

5. **Learn and advocate:** Learn about what legal advocates for women, domestic violence workers, immigration advocacy organizations, community organizers or women's business groups do. Find out the ways you can volunteer in the areas discussed above. Identify women-owned businesses in your area and support them. Also, encourage others to shop there.
6. **Learn and discuss:** Watch an hour of television, ideally with a few other people. Pay attention to how gender and sex are portrayed, giving particular attention to the advertisements. What behaviors and physical attributes are valued for males and for females? How are consumer products marketed to attain these desired attributes? Talk about what you see. Compare what seems to be valued in the media to your understanding of how we are valued as beloved children of God.

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 2

*(Note: After each topic, there is a question or two for further reflection or journaling.)

If you want to know a bit more about the development of gender identity: In Module 3 of this study the conversation will explore how gender is interpreted through the lens of biology. It will explore the argument posed by some theorists that gender is the product of social construction. The key concern is that the human body is a product of social forces. In this materialistic society, most of our choices are influenced by market forces. This means that market-based influences are responsible for significantly influencing our gender identities. (As we observed in the opening exercise, gender identity underlies all of the illustrations presented.)

To explain this point let's take a look at how our society views the female body. The female body is consistently objectified through the lens of the consumer market, most prominently in the media. Standards of beauty are given economic value and marketed. These standards of beauty often become the ideals prescribed for women and girls. Finally, femininity (as well as masculinity) is defined in terms of these prevailing market-generated standards of beauty. For a fuller explanation of gender identity, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; and Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Gender Inequality*. For a fuller discussion of economy and the social construction of gender see Alison Phipps, *The Politics of the Body*.

Can you think of other ways in which market forces influence the way we interpret the world?

If you want to know a bit more about remedying the social and economic injustices faced by women: How one thinks about the problem of inequality is related to debates about competing views of justice. In order to simplify for the sake of presenting basic ideas, some thinkers emphasize the importance of equity while others emphasize the importance of market freedom. Regardless of how the problem of injustice is viewed, one fact remains: Unequal distribution is evident in our economic practices. In our present context, women are usually most harmed by the current system of distribution. This problem affects the kind of society we aspire to be, and the kind of life women will enjoy as providers and citizens. For a fuller discussion of the injustices faced by women and potential remedies see: Rosalyn Muraskin, *Women and Justice: It's a Crime*.

Have you ever encountered an injustice of the types discussed above?

If you want to know a bit more about sexism and patriarchy: The definition of patriarchy is a description of a complex array of social relations, habits, laws, ideas and beliefs in which everyone participates in varying measures. Everyone contributes. Though there has been much social progress toward gender equity in the United States, patriarchy is still the dominant social system in the United States and within Christianity. For a fuller discussion of sexism and patriarchy see Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot*, 3rd ed.; and Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*.

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1. Write down three areas where you have seen or experienced patriarchy.
2. How does patriarchy distort the ways we understand men and women and their roles in our society?
3. How does patriarchy distort our ideas about God?

If you want to know a bit more about the church's role in perpetuating and supporting patriarchy: The debate over the domination of women in the church and society has been influenced by a reading of Genesis 2. Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) reading of Genesis 2:23 was influenced by the misogyny of the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Augustine concluded that men possess the image of God primarily, while women – because the first woman was created from Adam – possess the image of God secondarily. This reading has historically legitimated the subordination of women to men. For a fuller discussion of sexism and patriarchy in the church, see a classic on this, for example: Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*.

What do you think about the evidence given here that the church has perpetuated patriarchy?

If you want to know a bit more about oppression and injustice: As suggested above, gender oppression is a symptom of patriarchy. Oppression can take individual and structural forms. As a structural problem, oppression is perpetuated through social institutions and practices that privilege one group over another. Men in positions of leadership, for example, are rarely chastised for being “pushy or bossy,” while many women in leadership report that they struggle with these valuations repeatedly. Their disadvantage is thus reflected consciously or subconsciously through the privileging of gender.

The feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young identified five facets of oppression in her book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, which are pertinent to justice. These include: *exploitation*, *marginalization*, *powerlessness*, *cultural imperialism* and *violence*. Some women as individuals and women as a group suffer from *exploitation* in a variety of ways; this can occur in the household as well as in society. For example, if women are restricted solely or *primarily* to reproduction and child rearing, men can advance in the workplace at their expense. The second facet, *marginalization*, dismisses the importance and contributions of women by relegating them to the margins of society. The third facet applicable to women is *powerlessness*. If socially and in the household women have little voice or no power in decision-making processes, it affects them directly in matters such as reproduction, finances, health care and immigration. The fourth facet, *cultural imperialism*, is expressed in matters of culture where social practices prescribe norms of behavior that privilege men. The fifth facet deals with the disproportionate amount of *violence* (both verbal and physical) suffered by women in our society.

Write down at least one of these facets of oppression. Do you agree it is pertinent to justice? Why or why not?

ENDNOTES

¹ This illustration is based on an actual incident involving members of the task force. Names have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Social justice is committed to the values of respect, dignity, quality, concern and reconciliation for all people. As an agenda, it seeks to create a culture of solidarity and equality for all people. This includes: equal rights, gender equality, freedom from exploitation, the rejection of a dehumanizing materialism, and the equal distribution of societal goods and responsibilities. It actively promotes compensatory and distributive justice.

⁵ Historically, justice is considered one of the Cardinal Virtues. (They are prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.) Those in turn were added to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity to complete the Seven Christian Virtues.

⁶ Several ELCA statements use and develop these principles. Visit ELCA.org/socialstatements to read the relevant sections in *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*; *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, and *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*.

⁷ Social justice includes many dimensions, such as economic justice, retributive justice, distributive justice, commutative justice, structural justice and restorative justice.

3

How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

Welcome to a conversation about understanding sexism and its connections to our relationships, families, communities and the way we see ourselves and others. This conversation helps us explore how sexism prevents us from being the whole person that God created us to be and is therefore sin. It also will help us discover how God's grace can give us freedom in Christ to think anew about our relationships, communities and bodies in ways that affirm, celebrate and include our whole selves.



Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

Moment of silent reflection

I. WHAT IS SEXISM AND HOW DOES IT SHOW UP IN MY LIFE?

(10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Invite participants to spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on a couple of these questions. They are meant to help uncover how, when and where sexism might be infused in experiences, relationships and communities. Participants can write down their answers or share them with a partner.)*

1. When has someone doubted your ability to do something because of your gender?
2. When has someone assumed you could do something because of your gender?
3. When have you felt excluded from a conversation, situation, process or decision because of your gender?
4. When have you felt shame or inadequacy because you didn't live up to expectations placed on you because of your gender?
5. When have you felt uncomfortable or physically intimidated by another person's body language, either because of their gender or your gender?

In our time together, we will:

1. consider how gender-based stereotypes, social ideals and roles can empower or disempower.
2. discover where sexism shows up in our relationships, communities and culture.
3. learn how our unity and diversity in the body of Christ gives us new ways to think about our gendered bodies.

Sexism is that which promotes the silencing, controlling and devaluing of women, girls and **gender non-conforming people** and perpetuates male privilege and power.

Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

**(Note to leaders: Read the following material aloud. If time is short, read only the paragraphs in green shading.)*

Everyone is affected by sexism, sometimes in subtle ways and sometimes in very obvious, painful ways. Sexism is not just about what individuals do or think but is perpetuated by our communities, institutions, systems and culture.

Identifying, discussing and pointing out sexism is almost always difficult and uncomfortable. It can be challenging to see how gender affects our interpersonal relationships, because naming, calling out or recognizing sexism and gender-based inequality is discouraged or even taboo in our congregations, communities and culture. It is almost always easier to find alternative explanations – to talk about individuals' personalities, or pinpoint other situational factors that help us avoid the difficult task of seeing and naming the patterns at work in sexism.

When we talk about sexism, it can feel as though we are blaming each other. But it's important to remember that we all participate in sexism – sometimes in obvious ways and sometimes unconsciously. In this tacit participation, we have all “fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). At the same time, all of us are trapped and separated from one another and from God when we contribute to the problem of sexism. Women, girls and transgender people are objectified, excluded, exploited and ignored because of sexism. Because of sexism, men and boys are often pitted against one another, called on to “prove” their ability to be in control and dominant. No one wins.

II. HOW DOES SEXISM WORK? (15 MINUTES)

How do stereotypes and social expectations about gender add to the problem of sexism?

**(Note to leaders: Invite participants to brainstorm a list of 10-15 stereotypes and characteristics associated with men and boys and another list for women and girls. Write their answers on a white board. Ask them to talk about the following questions related to the lists.)*

1. Where do you fit on the list? Do characteristics you identify with only appear on one list, or on both? What about your friends and loved ones?
2. What tends to happen in our culture when someone displays a characteristic associated with someone of a different gender? Can you think of an example?
3. Are any of these gendered characteristics more closely associated with people of specific racial or ethnic backgrounds? How do these harmful stereotypes based on race and ethnicity add to the problem of sexism?
4. Which of the characteristics on this list are associated with roles and positions of power, visibility and **AGENCY** (being empowered to make consequential decisions about one's own life)?

Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

**(Note to leaders: Read the following text aloud. If time is short, use only the paragraphs in green shading.)*

In order to work against sexism in ourselves, our relationships and our communities, we have to understand how sexism plays out in everyday life. Sometimes gender-based inequality is easy to see, but often it's not; sexism usually shows up in our subconscious attitudes and impressions of the people around us.

Sexism often shows up in the gender-based stereotypes and expectations we place on people. This means that when we have only limited information about a person, we often fill in the gaps with stereotypes according to that person's gender. At the same time, we often internalize social expectations about how people of specific genders should be and act in the world. When these are imbedded subtly in our impressions of people, they make us more critical and suspicious of those who violate these prescriptive norms.

Stereotypes and social expectations about gender shape our understandings of ourselves and others from a very early age. These biases give shape to norms or codes of conduct that we learn to grow into. Often, we grow to become the gendered people that we're expected to be, which can seem to confirm the stereotypes that formed us in the first place. For example, boys learn how to keep themselves from crying in public, and girls learn to pay careful attention to their appearance. These learned behaviors then feed into stereotypes about boys and girls.

Stereotypes and social ideals about gender can harm anyone and everyone, but they predominantly harm women and girls. They pressure women and girls to fill roles with less access to power and agency.

How do gender roles add to the problem of sexism?

It can be difficult clearly to see and point out stereotypes and gendered expectations because they are so often unconscious. Yet, these biases are fed by and give birth to much more tangible manifestations of sexism in our lives: gender roles. Stereotypes and ideals work in tandem with gender roles to codify acceptable ways of being and acting for men and boys and women and girls. This happens in the household, in relationships, in congregations and in communities. Each of these roles is imbued with characteristics and expectations that come from and feed into stereotypes and cultural ideals.

Some gender roles have greater proximity to what is valued or has power in a community and culture. Stereotypes and expectations for men and boys often set them up to step into roles that afford them agency, decision-making power, leadership and visibility in our communities and societies. Some of these roles might be: provider, leader or protector.

For further personal reflection: When have gender expectations, stereotypes, and roles influenced your choices or the way you interact with others?

Stereotypes and expectations about femininity make it more difficult for women to step into leadership roles. In 2015, only 104 women held seats in Congress, comprising 19.4 percent of the 435 members. In the ELCA in 2015, only 9 (13.8 percent) out of 65 synodical bishops were women.

Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

Stereotypes and expectations for women and girls set them up to step into roles that give them less access to power, agency and visibility. Some of these roles might be: nurturer, caretaker, homemaker or supportive partner.

These roles are all good and essential to our communities; many women find fulfillment in supportive and nurturing roles as part of their vocation. However, as Lutherans, we recognize that vocation is not limited by the roles prescribed by unequal societies. When we limit ourselves and others to certain roles *because of gender*, we participate in the sexism that separates women, girls and gender-non conforming people from power and **AGENCY**.

III. WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF SEXISM ON OUR BODIES? (10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: In order to help participants feel grounded in their own bodies during this module, invite them to draw an outline of their hand in the middle of a blank piece of paper. As they listen to you and others read the following section about how sexism seeks to control our bodies, they can write down one method of control on each finger of the outline. Encourage participants also to jot down other words, images or statistics that are striking to them.)*

At age 13, 53 percent of American girls are "unhappy with their bodies." This grows to 78 percent by the time girls reach 17.¹

It is hard to think of anything more personal than our own bodies, anything more deeply connected to our culture's understanding of gender. While our bodies do not directly determine our gender identities or the gender-based ways we move through life, our bodies are closely connected to sexism. Through sexist stereotypes and ideals, and sometimes even brute force, our society often controls the bodies of women, girls and gender non-conforming people. For this reason, we need to talk together about human bodies and sexism.

Individuals, systems and our culture often:

1. **Objectify** the bodies of women and girls by holding them to unrealistic expectations of beauty, often associated with thin, white women.

The results of this can be seen easily in the troubling number of young women who report suffering from eating disorders, depression and body dysmorphia (excessive preoccupation with perceived flaws in one's physical appearance). For women and girls of color, sometimes the result of this objectification is evident in the commonplace use of harmful skin-whitening and hair-straightening chemicals and processes.

2. **Police** the bodies of women and girls by creating shame around female sexuality.

One concrete way we might see evidence of this is in the rising number

of instances in which ex-partners expose risqué photos or videos of their ex online, using shame to get revenge. This is called revenge porn, or non-consensual porn, and an estimated 90 percent of victims are women.²

3. **Politicize** the bodies of women and girls by linking cultural and political controversy over abortion to all forms of reproductive health care, including contraception, access to necessary reproductive health care, and access to information about bodies.³

For example, laws that place major restrictions on clinics that provide abortions result in significant burdens for women trying to obtain reproductive health care.⁴ This especially affects women with limited incomes who need all kinds of health services, including regular reproductive health check-ups and procedures.

4. **Dominate** the bodies of women, girls and gender non-conforming people through gender-based violence or the threat of violence. While violence is perpetuated by individuals, and sometimes against men or boys, gender-based violence functions as a whole to silence, shame, violate, exploit and terrify women, girls and gender non-conforming people.

There are many forms of gender-based violence, including but not limited to sexual harassment, sexual and intimate partner abuse, stalking, assault, rape, trafficking and murder.⁵ (Read more about violence in Module 5 of this study.)

5. **Marginalize** the bodies of people who do not conform to binary gender identities or biology. This includes transgender people and **intersex people** (those whose reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't easily fit into typically understood categories of male or female).

One result of this marginalization is evidenced by the fact that transgender people, especially people of color, are significantly more likely to be murdered than white **cisgender** people (people whose gender identity matches their biological sex assigned at birth).

In the United States, 1 in 6 women will be a victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime.⁶

Transgender people are 3.7 times more likely to be murdered by law enforcement, and over two thirds of anti-LGBTQ-related hate violence victimizes them.⁷

These problems are evidence of sin, not just because they deny the goodness of some bodies through control and domination, but also because they deny the diversity of human bodies. God's children do not fit easily into absolute, rigid dual categories of male and female, man and woman, masculine and feminine. Human beings are infinitely more complex and diverse than just these two poles allow us to be; we are wondrously diverse in our character, experiences, joys, sorrows, passions and vocations. When we attempt to force ourselves and each other to adhere to two extremes of human possibility, we are separated from who God has created us to be, and we participate in the sexism that harms God's children.

IV. HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER? (10 MINUTES)

The body of Christ

**(Note to leaders: To symbolize our diversity and unity in Christ through God's grace, invite participants to tape their hand outlines to the wall in the shape of a cross. Then read the following text aloud. If time is short, read only the paragraphs in green shading.)*

Through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God affirmed the goodness of our bodies, even in the face of all this objectification, shame, domination and marginalization. We are held together in God's promise of wholeness and healing.

In the face of this pervasive sexism, which is manifested in the objectification, domination and control of bodies, we can look toward Christ and to Scripture with questions about the inherent value and goodness of bodies. When we do so, we find our questions answered with the incarnation of Christ, the embodied Word of God. As the gospel writer of John explains, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Jesus, fully human, was born, walked, sat, spat, ate, wept and shouted. After God raised Jesus' body from the dead, Jesus ate bread, spoke and even invited Thomas to put fingers in his wounds. Both in the incarnation and in the resurrection, God confirms for us what was stated in Genesis: The creation of our bodies is good.

We remember this promise again with the sacrament of Holy Communion. As we receive the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, together with the bread and wine, into our own bodies, we are simultaneously united in the body of Christ gathered around the table. God affirms both our diversity and our unity together in these moments.

As Christians, Lutherans and children of God, we are called to do the difficult work of embracing the gifts of our rich unity and diversity in the body of Christ by finding ways to include, affirm and uplift people of every gender and every body in our work in the world and in the life of our church.

As Lutherans, how can we move forward?

**(Note to leaders: Divide participants into small groups and instruct each group to choose one of the following three themes to read and discuss: the work and witness of Jesus, vocation of the baptized, or participation in the liberating work of God. Let participants know that these three theological emphases are critical resources for confronting sexism. They can help us turn from sin to love and from sexism to the work God calls us to do in ourselves, our relationships and our society.)*

The work and witness of Jesus

Some Christian traditions and communities understand Jesus' maleness to mean that male bodies are closer to that of God incarnate or that male bodies are somehow more "good." In response to this, one might look toward Jesus' work and witness for clues about what Jesus' embodiment means specifically for women.

In the Gospels, a few patterns emerge. Jesus performs tasks that transcend strict binary gender roles; for example, he washes the feet of his disciples, a role that belonged to slave girls and wives.⁸ Jesus goes out of his way to heal and celebrate women and includes women in his ministry. Jesus' ministry and work in the world embodies justice and peace for all; again and again, Jesus explains that the reign of God upsets any group establishing itself as privileged, central or superior. At the end of his ministry, Jesus once again subverts the patriarchal ideal of control and domination by dying on the cross.

Discussion:

When sexism in our culture tells us that the bodies of women, girls and gender non-conforming people should be controlled and dominated, how does God's incarnation in Jesus help us see an alternative? How can you go out of your way in the next week to affirm the goodness of all bodies, not just those that our culture already validates? Think about the media you consume, policies you might advocate for, or problems you can speak out against.

Freedom and vocation

Luther's understanding that we are justified by God's grace through faith, rather than through the good works we do, redefined the role of works in Christian life. He offered the thesis that a Christian is paradoxically both perfectly free and dutifully subject to others.⁹ Luther spoke of this freedom that results from justification as like a tree that brings forth good fruit.

Many interpret this to mean that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live into God's work, regardless of the norms, biases and roles of our context. At the same time, we are subject to God's will on behalf of our neighbors and all creation. We are shaped by God's relationship with us, to live our lives freely for the neighbor, and we have the ability to make decisions with consequences for those around us. Simultaneously, we are also called into relationships, places and roles that are not limited by the roles prescribed by our patriarchal world.

Discussion: In your life and context, what kinds of gender roles, stereotypes and expectations do you feel *freed from*? What work do you feel *freed for*?

Participating in God's liberating work

Baptism affirms our vocation to work toward the liberation of all people of every gender, race and ethnicity, social class, immigration status, sexuality, age and ability. This is where we might draw on the theological traditions of **MUJERISTA**, **LIBERATION** and **WOMANIST THEOLOGY**, which have likened **JUSTIFICATION** to liberation from human systems that oppress people. Only God can usher in God's

Read more about Jesus' ministry and women in the Going Deeper section of this module.

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reign of justice and love, but we are called to ask how we can participate in God's work, seeking to establish justice and love in our society.

Discussion: Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." What does it mean to drive a spoke into the wheel of sexism and patriarchy? How might you drive a spoke in the wheel of sexism, as you begin to see it more clearly in your own life, family and communities?

IN CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should gather the group and read the following summary, guide the closing prayer, and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

As sinners, we are plagued by sexism in our human relationships, in how we see ourselves and others, and in how we structure our households and communities. Yet, even in the face of this monumental and pervasive challenge, we are reminded again and again by the sacraments and by God's embodiment in the world through Jesus Christ that our gendered bodies and our rich diversity are beloved and held together in Christ. As we wrestle with the sexism in our contexts, we can look toward God's promise of wholeness and grace, empowered to be agents of God's freedom in our world, alleviating the suffering of all those controlled, ignored and dominated by sexism.

Closing prayer

**(Note to leaders: See leader's guide for instructions on leading heart prayer.)*

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 127 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss3>.
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper** section to learn more about sexism and the body of Christ.
3. **Learn and discuss:** Watch the film, "Miss Representation," and use the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice's study guide to continue conversations in your congregation about the representation of women and girls in the media. Download the study at ELCA.org. Follow licensing rules.

4. **Learn and reflect:** Spend one or two days paying careful attention to the way women and girls are represented and presented in the media you consume: television, news, movies, songs, books, magazines, social media, etc. What messages about women and girls are being communicated? What stereotypes and ideals are perpetuated? What happens when women and girls violate social expectations about gender? What about men and boys? Talk about your findings with family and friends.
5. **Learn and advocate:** Learn about the laws in your area that marginalize and harm transgender people. Is it legal in your state to discriminate on the basis of gender identity? Contact your legislators and tell them how important it is to you, as a person of faith, to support, include and protect transgender people in all aspects of public life.
6. **Learn and practice:** Practice care for the neighbor by being supportive of those who are most harmed by sexism. Call out sexism when you encounter it, and practice believing and respecting women, girls and transgender people when they say they are harmed by sexism in relationships, families, congregations, workplaces and in our larger society.

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 3

If you want to know more about intersectionality: Sometimes it's difficult to tell if sexism is the main reason someone is treated in a certain way. Part of the murkiness is due to the reality that we all have many identities. Some of these identities afford people more authority and power. Some identities push people toward the margins of society. These identities, especially those having to do with race and ethnicity, ability, age, sexuality, class, nationality and immigration status intersect with gender in ways that are unique and complex. This is called **INTERSECTIONALITY**.

Here's an example: "I am a young, Asian woman, and it's often hard for me to pinpoint if my experiences are based solely on my race, my age or my gender. For example, one day, I was getting ice cream sundaes with some coworkers at a McDonald's when an elderly white man, who looked like anyone's grandpa, came very close to me. He said in a low, gravelly voice, 'I used to have pretty little things like you during the war all the time.' I was shocked, and I just walked away as quickly as I could, holding back humiliated tears."¹⁰

If you want to know more about the importance of naming sexism: Martin Luther argued in "The Heidelberg Disputation" that "a theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."¹¹ In this way we are called to recognize patterns of gender-based inequalities and to call them what they are: individual and shared sin that harms God's children. Naming and calling out sexism is almost always uncomfortable, but it is only through this naming and through identifying sexism as such an "evil" that we can begin to understand these forces and, through the grace and strength of God, work against them.

If you want to know more about gender expectations and stereotypes about girls and women: Gender expectations for women and girls are at once restrictive and contradictory; they devalue typically feminine characteristics and punish women and girls for acting or being in ways that are not feminine enough. For example, women and girls are pressured to be physically attractive in narrow, culturally defined ways. At the same time, women and girls are often criticized or stereotyped as vain and superficial.

Here's an example: "I used to get teased in my high school by girls because I didn't wear make-up, so eventually I caved and tried it out. At first I didn't like it. It made me feel like there was something wrong with my face as it was. Eventually I found that some days it can be fun to have my nails a wacky color, or to put on some cool eye make-up. But now I get comments, mostly from boys, that I must be dumb and shallow because I spend time in front of the mirror. I feel like I just can't win."¹²

What are examples of social ideals for women that are both expected and then also devalued in our culture? How is this different than expectations and stereotypes about men? Use your list of gendered characteristics to start your thinking.

If you want to know more about gender roles and sexism today: Sometimes, it's easy to imagine that, as a society, we've already solved the problem of sexism. However, even in the ELCA, sexism is still shaping people's lives.

Here's one example from an ELCA pastor: "I was turned down for a call in a congregation because I was a woman. The bishop had recommended me. The call committee had recommended me. Everything went well until the weekend of the vote. There was a whispering campaign, and I was voted down. 'What if her children need her?' 'Can she be a wife and a pastor at the same time?' I was astounded that these concerns were still being articulated 25 years after this church decided to ordain women."¹³ This story is not unique. Do these gender role expectations shape your family, congregation or community?

Our communities and culture have made great strides toward gender equity in the last hundred years. A few prominent examples are the passage of the 19th Amendment, Title IX, increased participation in the workforce, government and in academia, and, in the ELCA, the ordination of women. However, a great deal of work still needs to be done, especially when gender identity intersects with other marginalized identities and further disadvantage women of color, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender women, women with disabilities, women who are undocumented immigrants, and women who face other challenges in a world still struggling with sexism and inequality.

If you want to know about sexism and Scripture: Scripture is a precious gift and is at the heart of our life and mission together in Christ's church. It deserves our very best attention. Even as we affirm the great diversity and unity of our siblings in Christ, and even as we commit ourselves to struggle against the forces of sexism and inequality, we must face those sections of Scripture that have, for centuries, been used by many to enforce and sustain sexism.

One way to grapple with the problems in these texts is to study them with a historical lens. When we attempt to reconstruct the historical factors at play in these texts, we can uncover new understandings of the text's intended audience and purpose. Sometimes, this can shed light on how the text might reveal good news for us today. We can also examine these passages with a theological lens, using our own confessional tradition to help us with interpretation. When we affirm and confess that we are justified by grace through faith, when we look to Scripture to interpret Scripture, and when we can identify what proclaims Christ, our answers to the question of women and justice look different than those in these problematic texts. When we read Scripture using a neighbor-justice lens, we can come to different conclusions.

For example, a text like Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" proclaims Christ more clearly and helps us love our neighbors more faithfully than some of the texts that have been used to suppress or harm women, girls and transgender people. With our unity in Christ held at the forefront of our exegetical work, we are freer to interpret problematic texts as fragments of a pervasive patriarchy – one that still plagues us today. We become free to ask a critical question: "What does the Bible point us to?" We are free to ask, "What does this passage mean for us today?"

Women, justice and Scripture will be discussed in further detail in Module 7 of this study.

If you want to know more about Jesus and women: The question, “What does the Bible point us to?” opens our purview to examine many parts of Scripture, not just problematic texts. Then, we are free to look toward Christ as the seat of revelation for God’s will and activity for women and justice. In addition to affirming the goodness of our bodies, held together in our Baptism and Communion, we might ask questions such as, “What did Jesus say about and do for women?” The Gospels include scores of examples of Jesus loving, affirming, supporting, healing and revealing the love and grace of God especially to women.

- Jesus *heals* women. Throughout the synoptic Gospels we have several examples of Jesus healing women and girls, concerned with the health and bodies of women.
- Jesus *affirms* women and presents them as models of faith.
- Jesus *reveals* truth to women. He speaks with the Samaritan woman at the well, revealing to her that he is the Messiah, to Mary and Martha in Luke 10, and to Mary Magdalene, who became a disciple of Jesus’ ministry. Perhaps most significantly, it is to women that Jesus’ resurrection is first revealed.

Just as we can turn from problematic texts to Jesus’ embrace of women’s bodies, faith and ministry, so too can we pivot from the texts of patriarchal cultures to the promises of God’s care, healing, inclusion and revelation for women.

ENDNOTES

¹ An estimated 85 to 95 percent of people with anorexia or bulimia are female. Twenty percent of people suffering from anorexia will prematurely die from complications related to their eating disorder, including suicide and heart problems. See "Eating Disorders Statistics," National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>.

² Mary Anne Franks, "Drafting an Effective 'Revenge Porn' Law: A Guide for Legislators," *The Cyber Civil Rights Initiative*, published Nov. 2, 2015, p. 10, <http://www.cybercivilrights.org/guide-to-legislation/>.

³ The ELCA's social statement on *Abortion* states that, with regard to public policy, "any proposed regulation [on abortion] should contribute toward the intended goals without generating problems worse than those it seeks to address." The statement also argues, "Laws should be enacted and enforced justly for the preservation and enhancement of life, and should avoid unduly encumbering or endangering the lives of women. Because of our conviction that both the life of the woman and the life in her womb must be respected by law, this church opposes ... laws that deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions." See *Abortion*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 9-10. The social statement can be accessed in English and Spanish at <http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Abortion>.

⁴ According to a 2016 American Public Health Association study, targeted regulation of abortion provider laws enacted in Texas have "resulted in significant burdens for women able to obtain care." Forty-four percent of women whose closest clinic closed since 2013 now live more than 50 miles away from the nearest clinic, have out-of-pocket expenses greater than \$100, and report that it is somewhat or very hard to get to the clinic. See Caitlin Gerds, Liza Fuentes, Daniel Grossman, Kari White, Brianna Keefe-Oates, Sarah E. Baum, Kristine Hopkins, Chandler W. Stolp and Joseph E. Potter, "Impact of Clinic Closures on Women Obtaining Abortion Services after Implementation of a Restrictive Law in Texas," *American Journal of Public Health* 106, no. 5 (2016): 857-864, <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/>.

⁵ The ELCA's social message Gender-based Violence includes a more exhaustive list of types of gender-based violence. Download the message at www.ELCA.org/socialmessages.

⁶ Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998), 11.

⁷ "Hate Violence Against Transgender Communities," National Coalition of Anti-violence Programs, http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/ncavp_transhvfactsheet.pdf.

⁸ Ruth Habermann, "Gospel of John: Spaces for Women," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 673.

⁹ Martin Luther, "Treatise on Christian Liberty," 1520, LW 31.

¹⁰ Monologue adapted from "A Young, Asian Woman," in *Our Voices, Our Stories, Sexism in Church and Society*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009), 17-18.

¹¹ Martin Luther, "The Heidelberg Disputation," 1518, LW 31:40.

¹² This illustration is based on an experience of a member of the task force. Names have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

¹³ Monologue adapted from "Who Says?" in *Our Voices, Our Stories, Sexism in Church and Society*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009), 26.

4

What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?**OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)**

Welcome to a conversation about the economic effects of sexism and gender and sex discrimination in the lives of individuals, families and communities. Here we will see how we can follow Jesus and creatively live out our baptism and vocations in ways that work for justice for our neighbors in our economic life together.

Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and 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)

Moment of silent reflection

I. WHAT ARE THE BASICS THAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SEX AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE AND BROADER ECONOMY? (15 MINUTES)

“Sex discrimination involves treating someone ... unfavorably because of that person's sex Sex discrimination also can involve treating someone less favorably because of his or her connection with an organization or group that is generally associated with people of a certain sex. Discrimination against an individual because of gender identity, including transgender status, or because of sexual orientation is discrimination because of sex in violation of Title VII.”¹¹

In our time together we will:

1. learn basic data about sex and gender discrimination in the United States.
2. see how Christian teachings about the image of God and vocation help us advocate for equity in our economy.
3. explore Jesus' expansive welcome and Paul's teachings on baptism, which can inspire us to resist sex and gender discrimination.
4. reflect on our own stories and employment experiences and discuss where we see sexism and discrimination.

Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

**(Note to leaders: Read the following three quiz questions out loud and ask people what they think are the correct answers.)*

1. How much income will an individual caregiver lose over the course of their lifetime due to lost wages and benefits?
a. \$274,000.00 b. \$164,000.00 c. \$72,000.00 d. \$325,000.00
2. What percentage of minimum-wage earners are women?
a. 66% b. 50% c. 35% d. 46%
3. What percentage of transgender individuals reported an adverse job outcome (being fired or denied a promotion) because of being transgender?
a. 25% b. 35% c. 18% d. 47%

"In total, the impact of caregiving on the individual female caregiver in terms of lost wages and Social Security benefits over her lifetime equals \$274,044 ... as well as an estimated \$50,000 in lost pension income."⁴

A survey of transgender individuals reports, "Forty-seven percent said they had experienced an adverse job outcome, such as being fired, not hired or denied a promotion because of being transgender/gender non-conforming."⁵

"[M]edian weekly earnings for women who usually worked full time in 2012 were 82.8 percent of what their male counterparts earned."⁶

**(Note to leaders: Divide into small groups and invite each group to read one of the following stories aloud.⁷ They will then discuss the reflection question for each story.)*

Geri's story: An underemployed and underpaid caregiver

I am 52 years old, and I work 30 hours a week at a large retail store. I have a 10-year-old daughter. A year ago my mother fell and sustained an injury that prevented her from caring for herself, so I cut my hours to part-time to help her. When I worked full-time, I was paid an hourly wage that covered our family expenses. I earned less than my male co-workers, but I did get health insurance for myself and my daughter. I lost our health insurance when I changed to part-time work.

My brother helps our mother too. But he doesn't think cooking and cleaning are a man's work. So I spend more time caring for my mom than my brother does. I devote about 15 hours a week to helping my mom. If I could get compensated – even a little – for assisting my mother, it would help me feel like I wasn't so on the edge financially. And I could put some money away for my daughter's education.

Reflect on Geri's story: What assumptions about men, women and work do you hear in Geri's story? What is your reaction to her brother's belief that some duties are "women's work," and that women are better caregivers than men? How might your faith lead you to be a neighbor and act for justice for Geri?

"Women spend about four hours a day on unpaid work, while men spend about two hours and a half."⁸

The correct answers are:

1. Correct answer is a. \$274,000.00.¹ Answer d. is also correct if you count lost pension.
2. Correct answer is a. 66%²
3. Correct answer is d. 47%³

Meg's story: Gender and sex discrimination at work

I am 29 years old, and I work full-time at a computer consulting company that has about 40 full-time employees. I get along with most of my co-workers, and I enjoy the technical part of my work. But there is one thing I don't like about my job. The company is really family centered. And by 'family' the owners mean a straight, married, heterosexual family with children. We have family-friendly parties at Christmas and the Fourth of July. But my partner, Amy, isn't welcome. She attended the Christmas party once, and some of the people I worked with practically refused to talk with her. They don't view my family as the right kind of family. I've stopped attending these "family" parties.

This may hurt me professionally. My employers also host family nights at sporting events. Two years ago, I did not attend a family night at a baseball game. I did not want to go without Amy, and she did not want to deal with my co-workers. Within 10 days, another employee from my division was promoted even though she has much less experience and technical skills than I do. She attended the baseball game with her family. I can't help but wonder if part of the reason that she got promoted instead of me is that she is straight, married and has kids.

Reflect on Meg's story: Where did you sense gender discrimination in Meg's story? How did Meg feel about the way Amy was treated by Meg's co-workers? If you were Meg's co-worker, what could you do to be a neighbor to Meg and support her at work?

Many families and individuals suffer intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.

**(Note to leaders: Direct participants to circle the words that catch their attention as this paragraph is read aloud.)*

It is important to recognize that many individuals experience multiple and intersecting oppressions all at once. They may face sex or gender discrimination. And they may also be treated differently because of their race or because of the language they speak. Some struggle because they are also caregivers, while many others aren't paid fairly because of their legal status. Far too many individuals struggle economically because of the way these different forms of oppression (sexism, racism, **ABLE-ISM**, **HETEROSEXISM**, and nationalism) intersect and harm them and their families.

What does justice look like? "Caring, serving, keeping, loving and living by wisdom – these translate into justice in political, economic, social and environmental relationships. Justice in these relations means honoring the integrity of creation and striving for fairness in the human family. It is in hope of God's promised fulfillment that we hear the call to justice; it is in hope that we take action."

(From the ELCA social statement *Caring for Creation*)?

II. HOW ARE SEXISM AND GENDER AND SEX DISCRIMINATION EXPRESSIONS OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SIN? (10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Divide your group into small groups. Invite groups to read the following paragraphs aloud and discuss one of the reflection questions.)*

In our current economic context, Christians must speak up and call sexism and gender and sex discrimination what they are – sin. While sin occurs in our relationship with God, it also arises in creation when we sin against one another. Sexism and gender and sex discrimination are expressions of personal sin. When we think that others are of less value than we are because of their sex or gender, or when we believe that others do not bear God's image in the same way because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, we sin. We sin against the individual – who is the gift. And we sin against God – who is the giver.

In addition, sexism and gender and sex discrimination are also social or structural sin. This occurs when the very structures, rules, and policies of companies, institutions and communities discriminate against groups of people and individuals. Unfortunately, we often knowingly and unknowingly participate in these sinful structures. For example, we may work for, shop at, or invest in companies and institutions that have sexist or discriminatory policies and labor practices. In addition, our individual sexist beliefs may stop us from seeing structural sins.

The leadership gap and the wage gap between men and women is widely documented. But what about in the church? Perhaps sexist personal beliefs about women, work, men and leadership are supporting structural policies about education, employment and compensation that curtail economic well-being and make it difficult for women to assume leadership positions in the ELCA.

“New national data reveals that women clergy earn 76 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.”¹⁰

Within the ELCA, women clergy on average earn 86 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.¹¹

“If the pace of change in the annual-earnings ratio continues at the same rate as it has since 1960, it will take another 45 years, until 2059, for men and women to reach parity.”¹⁴

The gender pay gap: A recent report shows that – compared to what a white, male worker earns – Hispanic women earn 54 percent, African American women earn 64 percent, American Indian women earn 59 percent and Asian American women earn 90 percent.¹²

“[I]n 2009 ... women one year out of college who were working full time were paid, on average, just 82 percent of what their male peers were paid.”¹³

Reflection questions on the sins of sexism and gender discrimination

1. **Who does the household chores where you live?** Who does which chores in your household? Are household tasks based on any sex or gender stereotypes? Do you want to make any changes to the way these tasks are assigned? “American girls spend about two hours on chores a week more than boys, and are 15 percent less likely to be paid for them.”¹⁵
2. **Think about where you work.** What percentage of the employees at your work are male or female? Is there an equal balance of men and women in leadership? What do you notice about how individuals are treated in terms of gender and sex at your workplace? How are LGBTQ individuals treated where you work?
3. **Consider clergy inequity.** Why do you think that women who are clergy of all denominations still earn so much less than men who are clergy? Why did the ELCA have only nine bishops who are women out of a total of sixty-five in 2015? Where do you see personal or structural sin affecting clergy compensation or leadership equity?

**(Note to leaders: This exercise is optional if you have time. The goal of this activity is to have people experience inequity.)*

An inequity exercise: Tell people not to eat the candy you are going to give them, and tell participants you are going to reward them for being such good learners. Then give each man in the room 10 M&Ms. Then give some of the women seven M&Ms and give some of the other women six M&Ms. Ask participants how they feel about the unfair distribution of the candy. Is there any relationship between how much candy someone received and their participation in the discussion? What would neighbor justice look like in this situation?

III. HOW CAN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION EMPOWER US TO RESIST SEXISM AND GENDER AND SEX DISCRIMINATION?

(15 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Have the activity supplies ready at the tables before your module begins. Read the following paragraphs aloud and invite participants to circle words that catch their attention. Invite participants to move right into the activity after the paragraphs are read.)*

Even though it may seem impossible, hearts can change, and sexist and **HETERONORMATIVE** (supports only heterosexuality) stereotypes can be laid aside to create a more just economic life together. As Lutheran Christians, the promises of Scripture and the example of Jesus Christ embolden us to resist sexist beliefs and discriminatory economic practices.

All people are co-creative creatures called by God to work in the world.

In Genesis 1:26 we read that humans were created in God's image at the same time. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'" In Genesis 2:22 we read, "[A]nd the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man God made into a woman and brought her to the man." Even though Genesis describes the creation of humans in two ways, people often focus on the story of Eve being made from Adam's rib. This account has been used to justify the hierarchy of males over females.

But Genesis 1 offers the word that everyone bears the image of God equally. Today, many biblical scholars and theologians suggest that being created in God's image means that (1) humans are co-creative creatures with God. And being in God's image also means that (2) as persons—like the persons of the Trinity—we are called to be in relationship with God, others and creation. As co-creative creatures we are called to use our talents and gifts to serve the neighbor in God's good world. Because all persons are in God's image and are of equal value, discriminating against someone (or a group) based on their race, sex, nationality, gender, religion, orientation, class or embodiment is sinful and unjust. When we strive for economic justice, and when we do this work in and with the Holy Spirit, we live into the biblical promise that everyone is made in God's image.

We are called to create welcoming communities where all of God's children are treated equitably.

There are several themes in the New Testament that can support us as we work for economic and workplace justice. If we employ a neighbor-justice reading, we can see two closely related promises that empower our work for economic equity. The first is Jesus' practice of expansive welcome, and the second is Paul's teachings about baptism.

Many times in his ministry, Jesus refused to treat people differently because of their national identity, embodiment, family background or sex and gender. He spoke with and ministered to Romans, Samaritans and to those who were sick. In one text, Jesus even refused to distinguish between his biological family and his followers. He said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21-22). Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can follow Jesus and set aside cultural stereotypes about sex, gender, race, nationality, etc. And we can work toward justice for all by practicing Jesus' expansive welcome in our vocations, faith-families and places of employment.

Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

“[M]edian weekly earnings for women who usually worked full time in 2012 were 82.8 percent of what their male counterparts earned.”¹⁵

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3: 27-28)

The second biblical resource that empowers us is the promise that through our baptism God has united us. Baptism into the body of Christ creates a unity that makes the distinctions of sex, economic class, status and nationality less important than each person's identity in Jesus Christ. God has made us each as we are, and Christ has made us one. Culturally determined stereotypes about women/men, poor/rich, resident/immigrant, slave/free, straight/queer or able-bodied/disabled must be rejected. This baptismal impartiality – like Jesus' expansive welcome – enlivens a radical vision of a social and economic community based on equity.

Reflection activities:

**(Note to leaders: Lead the group in one of the following reflection activities.)*

Reflect on being a created co-creator by making a symbol of creativity. Using the craft clay provided, ask participants to create a shape, object or symbol that represents creativity for them. Then ask people to get into pairs and discuss the following questions. (1) How does your sculpture symbolize creativity for you? (2) What do you do as a part of your daily work that is creative? (3) How would you feel if someone told you you could not use your creative talents because of your race, sex, gender, embodiment, educational level or citizenship status?

Reflect on Jesus' expansive welcome by creating a welcome mat. Using the paper, pens and crayons provided, ask participants to write words or draw images on the welcome mat that express Jesus' expansive welcome. Next ask participants to write or draw the words or images that make them feel welcome. Then ask people to get into pairs and discuss the following questions. (1) What words or images did you put on your welcome mat? (2) What things does your congregation do that may discourage new people from attending services? (3) What would it look like if your congregation extended Jesus' expansive welcome to visitors?)

IV. HOW CAN LUTHERAN TEACHINGS ABOUT VOCATION HELP US ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE IN OUR COMMON ECONOMIC LIFE? (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Ask volunteers to read the following paragraphs aloud. If you have time, discuss the reflection questions on vocations in pairs.)*

As Lutheran Christians, we can draw on Martin Luther's teachings about vocation as a way of valuing and respecting each person's work. Luther taught that every person is called to serve God and the neighbor in creation. Our vocations can be described as the ways that we respond to this call from God and use our gifts to serve the neighbor in the world. Lutheran theology teaches that almost any work, paid or unpaid, can be understood as a vocation, whether one is baking or banking, planting or parenting. Furthermore, we have several vocations at the same time (student or worker, family-member, citizen, volunteer, etc.). It is also important to celebrate and support those whose vocations call them to work that is unpaid but nevertheless is a vital contribution to community and neighbor.

“[A]lthough in this life grace has many forms and there are various kinds of vocations, the same God is the God of all ... whether they are rich or poor, provided that they hold fast to the Word and persevere in the faith.”¹⁶

In addition, Luther claimed that God is working in our work and through our bodies. He wrote, “God no longer wants to act in accordance with God's ... absolute power but wants to act through God's creatures, whom God does not want to be idle. Thus God gives food, not as ... when God gave manna from heaven, but through labor, when we diligently perform our calling.”¹⁷

So when we think about the difficult realities of sexism and gender and sex discrimination, we can argue that every person's work should be respected. Work can be an expression of an individual's creativity and vocation, and everyone should be equitably paid. Because there are many phases in each person's vocation and life journey, we should also honor the callings of those who are in situations (unemployed, underemployed, retired, etc.) in which they are not compensated for their work.

Reflection questions on vocation: (If you have time.)

1. Ask people to pair off and discuss what they view as their gifts or talents and how they use these gifts in the world to serve the neighbor.
2. Discuss how you would feel if someone in authority said you could not pursue your vocation (or your career) because of the assumptions that they made about you as an individual or as a member of a particular group.

V. IN CLOSING: (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should gather the group and read the following summary, guide the closing prayer, and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

This module is grounded in the promise that God calls all people to just and equitable relationships with others and creation. We have recognized how our economic relationships are often distorted and fractured by the personal and structural sins of patriarchy and sexism. We've been called to embrace one another in relationship as equal co-creative creatures in God's image. We have encountered Jesus' practice of expansive welcome and renewed our understanding of the way baptism unites us as one body in Jesus Christ. Finally, we have learned how Lutheran teachings about vocation empower us to help all people equitably live out their vocations in the world. These promised gifts can help us as we work for justice on behalf of the neighbor in God's good creation.

**(Note to leaders: As an option, you could conclude by discussing the following questions in a large group. Before beginning the discussion, ask everyone to quietly formulate their brief answer to one of the questions below.)*

1. What will you take away from this module? What was useful for you?
2. Read the action steps below. Which might you take to advocate for economic justice for yourself or the neighbor?
3. What will you tell a close friend or family member about what you learned here today?
4. What other steps might you take as a way of following up on what you learned?

Closing prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 129 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss4>.
2. Read this module's **Going Deeper**.
3. **As you move through your week**, notice places where there is a need for practices of neighbor justice around sexism and ask the following questions. What is my prayer right here? What action might I take on behalf of the neighbor?
4. **Learn and reflect:** Have a conversation with your family about who does household chores and what tasks each family member performs. Do the members of your household help with tasks that are typically associated with a particular sex or gender? Do you want to make any changes to the way family members keep your household running?
5. **Learn and discuss:** What are the salary and benefit packages of the part-time and full-time employees in your congregation? Ask a member of your church council how your pastor's salary compares with that of other clergy in the area. Contact the synod office and ask your bishop about the differences between what male and female clergy are paid in your synod.
6. **Learn and advocate:** Find out if your state (or employer) offers legal protections for LGBTQ individuals against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. If not, find out which advocacy groups are doing this work and join their efforts.

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 4

If you want to know a bit more about personal sin: When we accept harmful cultural stereotypes about what a “man” can do, what is a “woman’s” proper role, or how a “gay man” or “lesbian woman” should be or act, we sin as well. We fail to receive these people as God’s unique children who are called to live out their vocations in the world. In addition, we also limit the possibilities for our own lives and work when we accept sexist stereotypes about gender, sex, family and work.

If you want to know a bit more about the inter-weaving of social and personal sin: Brazilian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez describes the interconnection of personal and social sin this way. “[S]in is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of persons with each other, it is a turning in of individuals on themselves ... sin is a personal and social intrahistorical reality.”¹⁸

If you want to know more about Luther’s teaching that Christians are simultaneously saint and sinner: As Lutherans we are well prepared to confess the personal and social sins of sexism and gender and sex discrimination. This is because Luther taught that Christians are saint and sinner at the same time. He wrote, “Now, is the Christian individual perfectly righteous? No, for they are at the same time both a sinner and a righteous person.”¹⁹ Acknowledging that we are sinners helps us confess that we often participate in organizations and structures with discriminatory policies and practices. Trusting that through faith in Christ our sins are forgiven frees us from the need to prove our own self-worth and frees us to recognize the God-given dignity of all people, in our communities and in our workplaces.

If you want to know more about being a co-creative creature working in God’s good world: Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner describes being a co-creator this way. “Human beings are God’s created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us.”²⁰ Every single person has a vocation to co-create with God in the world. When an individual is denied the chance to pursue their vocation because of their sex or gender, they are being treated unjustly. If someone (like Geri) is compelled to perform work because it is supposedly woman’s or man’s work, that person’s creativity is being limited. And when someone receives lower pay because of sexual orientation (like Meg), this person is being denied the opportunity to thrive economically as a co-creative creature in God’s good world.

If you want to know more about Jesus’ expansive welcome: Jesus did call 12 male disciples (Matthew 10:1-4). But the Gospels also reveal that Jesus was closely followed by and ministered to by women (Luke 8:1-3, Luke 10, and John 11). Jesus taught about God’s expansive welcome by telling a story about a banquet. When the people with money and status refused to attend, the host extended an expansive welcome to all kinds of people. (Luke 14:15-24)

If you want to know more about how law and gospel encourage us to seek equity for all: Jesus welcomed many, but he also challenged people to turn from selfishness and sin, and he called them to put the needs of the neighbor before

their own needs. When Jesus told the rich young man to give his money to the poor, the young man could not do it. "When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Matthew 19:21-22). Jesus' words welcomed some, and accused others – like the young man.

Martin Luther recognized this dynamic in Jesus' teachings and in all of Scripture. Luther distinguished between the law and the gospel. Luther wrote, "From this it is sufficiently evident what the distinction is between the Law and the Gospel. The Law never brings the Holy Spirit; therefore it does not justify, because it only teaches what we ought to do. But the Gospel does bring the Holy Spirit, because it teaches what we ought to receive."²¹ The law includes the divine activity of God's good and just demands. The gospel is the good news of God's salvation given in Jesus Christ. The law urges us to confess that we participate in and therefore perpetuate sexist structures. The gospel frees us to live into the promise of a new community where everyone is equally valued. Both law and gospel call us to create economic justice for ourselves and for our neighbors.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Older Women Workers and Economic Security," Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor updated February 2015, http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/olderwomen_issuebrief-f-508.pdf.

² Tara McGuinness, David Madland, Nick Bunker, "Women and Families Would be the Lead Recipients of a Minimum-Wage Boost," *Center for American Progress*, February 2013, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/news/2013/02/13/53334/women-and-families-would-be-the-lead-recipients-of-a-minimum-wage-boost/>.

³ Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, "Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf.

⁴ US Department of Labor, http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/olderwomen_issuebrief-f-508.pdf.

⁵ National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce and National Center for Transgender Equality, http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf.

⁶ Lawrence H. Leith, "Why Do Women Still Earn Less Than Men?" U.S. Department of Labor, published June 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2014/beyond-bls/why-do-women-still-earn-less-than-men.htm>.

⁷ These stories are based on composite situations shared with members of the task force.

⁸ Bill Gates and Melinda Gates, "Our 2016 Annual Letter: If You Could Have One Superpower, What Would It Be?" *gatesnotes*, published Feb. 22, 2016, https://www.gatesnotes.com/2016-Annual-Letter?WT.mc_id=02_22_2016_20_AL2016_MED-media_&WT.tsrc=MEDmedia.

⁹ *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993), 6.

¹⁰ Tobin Grant, "Gender pay gap among clergy worse than national average—A first look at the new national data," National Religion News Service, published Jan. 12, 2016, <http://tobingrant.religionnews.com/2016/01/12/gender-pay-gap-among-clergy-worse-than-national-average-a-first-look-at-the-new-national-data/#sthash.jCEtYJr5.dpuf>.

¹¹ "45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rostered Leader Survey" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, forthcoming).

¹² "The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap," American Association of University Women, published February 2016, <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>.

Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

¹³ “Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year After College Graduation Executive Summary and Recommendations,” American Association of University Women, published March 2013, <http://www.aauw.org/files/2013/03/Graduating-to-a-Pay-Gap-The-Earnings-of-Women-and-Men-One-Year-after-College-Graduation-Executive-Summary-and-Recommendations.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ariane Hegewisch and Heidi Hartman, “The Gender Wage Gap: 2014,” Institute for Women's Policy Research, published September 2015, <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-gender-wage-gap-2014#sthash.dGHVDvs3.dpuf>.

¹⁵ Bill Gates and Melinda Gates, see footnote 2.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” 1535, LW 3:142.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 274; see also 273.

¹⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 85.

¹⁹ Luther, “Lectures on Galatians,” 1535, LW 26:260.

²⁰ Philip J. Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27.

²¹ Luther, LW 26:208.

5

How can we address violence against women and girls?

OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

Welcome to a conversation on violence against women and girls. As Lutheran Christians, we live in a tension. We not only know that when God created humanity in the divine image, God said it was good, but also that we are in bondage to sin. Jesus Christ moves us out from under the heavy weight of bondage. Now freed, we are called by God to be the eyes, ears, hands, feet and voices of God's healing justice for our neighbor.

**(Note to leaders: Please stress the following message. Please know that there are stories and information in this session that may be upsetting. If at any time you feel that it is important to leave the room, please do so. I will be sure to check in with you privately.)*

Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

When the LORD established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.
(The voice of Wisdom, Proverbs 8:27, 29c-31)

Moment of reflection

**(Note to leaders: Invite participants to briefly share a word or image that they noticed as the text was read.)*

I. WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE? (10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Read the following introduction aloud.)*

With the empowerment of God's grace, we turn to face squarely and engage gender-based violence. In the ELCA, we have a critical resource, the ELCA's social message on "Gender-based Violence" (2015). It provides a succinct definition:

Gender-based violence is "physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons."¹

**In our time together, we will:**

1. identify what this violence is and how it operates.
2. develop insight into barriers that stand in our way, and in the way of our faith community, to resisting this violence.
3. begin to imagine new ways to approach, engage and decrease violence against women and girls.

Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?

While it is helpful and important to have definitions, most of our own lives are connected to gender-based violence in some way.

**(Note to leaders: Give participants about two minutes to briefly write down for themselves the names of people they know or know about who have been hurt in these ways for gender-based reasons. This personal reflection serves as an anchor into the rest of the module.)*

As you turn from your personal reflections on the ways gender-based violence affects your life and people in your life to a few statistics specifically about violence against women and girls, think about how common this violence is. The threat of such violence hovers over women and girls around the world. We know this violence is wrong.

In the United States, there is increasing public attention to the problems of intimate partner violence (sometimes called domestic violence) and sexual assault. Violence against women and girls takes many forms, both in the U.S. and throughout the world.

**(Note to leaders: Decide in advance if you will invite members of your group to reflect on the list of statistics or on the group of stories. Invite participants to read the following statistics or stories aloud and to make at least one observation for themselves.)*

STATISTICS

Statistics help us to see the big picture of the problem of gender-based violence.

According to the United Nations, “In 2012, a study conducted in New Delhi found that 92 percent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 percent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime.”²

Seventy percent of all people trafficked are women and girls. Two out of every three child trafficking victims are girls.³

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, about 4.8 million women in the U.S. are the targets of intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes annually. That is almost 13,500 women every day for a year. Fewer than 20 percent of them sought medical treatment following an injury.⁴

Almost half of the women killed around the world in 2012 were killed by intimate partners or family members, far fewer than the less than 6 percent of men killed by partners and family members in the same year.⁵

One national study estimates that in 2006, more than 600 women were raped or sexually assaulted every day.⁶

These are a very few of the many examples of gender-based violence. These statistics demonstrate the scope of the problem.

Specific experiences of people help us personalize the overwhelming statistics and empathize with others.

STORIES

“On Aug. 8 [2015], David Conley allegedly broke into his ex-girlfriend Valerie Jackson’s house in Houston, Texas, and killed her, her husband and her six children, methodically shooting each one in the head. Jackson had recently dumped Conley and reunited with her husband after Conley allegedly smashed her head into a refrigerator.”

“Although they get the lion’s share of media attention, public mass shootings like the ones in Charleston, Lafayette, and Chattanooga aren’t representative of the typical mass shooting in the U.S. ... The majority of mass shootings in the U.S. take place in private. They occur in the home, and the victims are predominantly women and children.”⁷

“My rapist was already on probation for sexually assaulting another woman when I reported him. He had admitted to sexually assaulting her and was simply put on probation. When the process began for my case, I immediately started having anxiety attacks almost daily. [I waited] for two months to find out if my rapist was going to be able to stay on campus for another year and a half (rarely being updated on the progress of my case). ... Quite possibly the most traumatizing encounter I had with an administrator was when I met with someone to discuss how unsafe I was feeling with my rapist living so close to me, that I was worried he would do something again. She told me that she had recently met with him and he ‘didn’t seem like the type of person who would do something like that.’”⁸

“On Aug. 14 [2015] the number of transgender people murdered in America this year hit a historic high of 15, according to advocacy organizations like the National Center for Transgender Equality. This somber milestone was hit when the remains of Elisha Walker, 20, were discovered in a North Carolina field several months after she went missing. Like the majority of the other victims, Elisha was not just transgender but a young transgender woman of color.”⁹

**(Note for leaders: Hear from a few people in the large group about what surprised them or stood out to them.)*

According to the ELCA social message, “Gender-based Violence,” gender-based violence may characterize or include the following examples:

“Sexual and other physical assault, including murder; rape; sexual harassment (sometimes called bullying); sexual, physical and verbal abuse, including coercion; stalking; intimate relationship violence that includes employment, housing or educational intimidation and obstruction; elder abuse or child abuse; sex-specific torture; reproductive coercion; female genital mutilation; 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.”¹⁰

II. WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS? (20 MINUTES)

Gender-based violence permeates our culture.

**(Note to leaders: Take two minutes for responses from the group to this prompt: Name places you see violence against women and girls in the news and in our everyday culture. After writing down their answers, note that even though we can all name places where violence against women and girls is part of our culture, we sometimes struggle to acknowledge it. Then invite a volunteer to read the following paragraph aloud.)*

Few of us would claim that the concept of gender-based violence is new to us. We may often feel we can't get away from these themes: in the news and media, in games, movies and other entertainment, and whether we are aware of it or not, it permeates our communities and often our personal experience.

Sometimes we struggle with denial and resistance.

**(Note to leaders: Invite people to pair off with a safe partner. Ask each pair to choose one or more of the following questions to explore. Be clear that the discussion between the pairs is their private reflection, unless someone chooses later to share their own individual thoughts with the large group. Then read the following paragraph aloud.)*

Many of us also may believe that this violence does not touch us or our friends or family. We may feel resistance when men are named as the primary perpetrators of this violence or when confronted with the gravity and extent of gender-based violence. Sometimes we even find ourselves mistrustful of women and girls who report abuse or assault, suspecting that they are reporting falsely or exaggerating. It would seem that gender-based violence is both unavoidably explicit in our society and simultaneously so often also invisible or disputed. It is important to think about why this is so.

1. Where do I feel confronted by violence against women and girls? Does it feel like there are ways for me to avoid these depictions, news stories or entertainment, or is it inescapable? Do I choose to pay attention? Notice what feelings accompany your observations of your awareness of this violence in the world, whether news-based or fictionalized and recycled.
2. What might be contributing factors to what I don't know about gender-based violence in my immediate community? What might influence a survivor's willingness to share or not share their stories, to seek justice against

their abusers, or to seek the care that could support them in their healing? Notice the relative ease or difficulty in empathizing with those most directly hurt by this violence. If you are affected by gender-based violence, in what circumstances have you felt like sharing your own story?

3. If I feel resistance to this topic, what defenses are possibly triggered in me? Am I afraid of what the implications or judgments are of men explicitly being named as the primary perpetrators of this violence? Is it too horrifying a reality to be true? Would it feel safer or more palatable to me if victims/survivors were somehow to blame or complicit in the harm enacted against them or were at least incidental and not targeted? Approach your resistance without judgment, only sincere curiosity and compassion.

**(Note to leaders: Return everyone to the full group.)*

There are three great challenges to face.

**(Note to leaders: Ask participants to take turns reading the following paragraphs or the marked text. As they do so, list the three challenges on a white board.)*

As people of faith, three great challenges must be overcome to begin to consistently and effectively curb the reign of violence against women and girls.

1) There is the problem of the insidious, **systemic nature of sin** – the structures in place that support a culture in which this violence is not only replicated but increased. A patriarchal social system communicates that women and girls are supposed to be controlled or subdued. This idea pervades families, institutions and the media. We are all socialized to protect and enforce these values. To imagine that we are outside of the cycle perpetuating violence against women is false. If we fail to actively and consistently address harmful attitudes and beliefs about sex and gender in ourselves and others, the violence will continue to be excused or rationalized.

2) We face **our own discomfort** and even disgust with the reality of gender-based violence. Often without even knowing it, we employ our defenses against it: denial, avoidance, minimization, thinking this violence is only elsewhere, doubting or blaming victims/survivors, etc. We see these defenses active not only in ourselves as individuals, but in the systems that fail to prosecute perpetrators or to protect survivors.

As acknowledged earlier in this session, there is great pain and trauma in this topic for many people. Targeted violence against women, girls, and people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender reminds us of a deep brokenness in humanity and a truly troubling deprivation of the basic right to safety and security. Also, our justice systems, educational systems and even churches repeatedly fail to take seriously the issue of violence against women and often contribute to further traumatizing survivors rather than participating in justice or healing.

Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?

According to Martin Luther, a theology of the cross recognizes God hidden in the suffering; God's presence is most fully revealed in Jesus on the cross. At times this concept has been misused to encourage women in abusive situations to "suffer as Jesus did," knowing that God is with them in their suffering. While God is most certainly present with those who suffer, the theology of the cross is never justification of suffering and violence. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God is at work to bring an end to suffering, violence and death!

Think about the reactions you remember (yours and/or others) to the #YesAllWomen campaign¹² on social media in 2014. What do you notice looking back? (#YesAllWomen is a Twitter hashtag and social media campaign to share examples or stories about violence against women and sexism.)

3) As a consequence of the first two challenges above, we often harbor **resistance to name** aloud the fact that perpetrators are overwhelmingly heterosexual men and boys.¹¹ There is a misconception that in doing so, people who speak this truth are encouraging hostility toward or denigrating all men. What we get as a result is discussion about the problem of women as victims of violence but avoidance of discussion about the problem of men as perpetrators of this violence. The focus of conversation reinforces gender-based violence as a "women's issue," further protecting perpetrator culture.

While we may bring ourselves to a place to address the culture that feeds violence ideologically, we struggle to address it tangibly in our own communities – in ourselves and others, especially those we love. Everyone experiences some level of defensiveness around this topic, although it can be difficult for us to recognize these defensive mechanisms. Our ego gets in the way, both in confronting another and in being confronted in our own error. And so, a spouse may make a risqué remark or joke, and it slides by uncomfortably. A friend in the locker room makes a denigrating comment about the previous night's conquest and is met with affirmative laughter. An aunt tersely criticizes a fellow congregant who "won't leave her husband like everyone's said she should, and at this point, just deserves what's coming to her," and goes unchecked. Meanwhile, we sigh impatiently that Suzy went to a party and drank again, when she should know that's just setting herself up to be raped.

**(Note to leader: With the challenges listed on a board or newsprint, use the following to guide the group into discussion.)*

Name at least three ways that your study about sexism in other modules supports the idea that violence against women and girls is rooted in systemic sin. Name at least three ways you see the messages of sexism connected to violence against women and girls.

III. WHAT GIFTS OF FAITH HELP US ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS? (10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: As participants take turns reading the following section, list the three gifts of faith on a white board or newsprint. Guide the group to discuss one or more of the questions that follow, depending on time.)*

As people of faith, we are given in the gospel three great gifts of possibility to aid us in participating in ending the reign of violence against women and girls.

1) We know scripturally and theologically that all bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Violence is rarely justifiable; it is particularly horrific when we permit its perpetuation against some people and their bodies because they are seen to matter less. The church as the body of Christ knows that to harm any member of the corporate body is to harm Christ; to denigrate the temple of the Spirit is to denigrate the Spirit.

This sacred knowledge gives us not only ground in our holy conviction to end this violence, but also an awareness of how these injustices ripple beyond those immediately affected into all of our lives, and into God's heart as well. As significant a web as sin has woven in sexism, the web of the goodness of God's creation and our reconciliation in the grace of God through Christ is greater indeed.

2) We trust that justification by grace through faith frees us from our ego that throws up defenses against our engagement of violence against women. We have assurance of God's love and forgiveness for all our sin, and we are heirs to the promise of the kingdom. The freedom of God's grace in Christ compels us to act, even as we know we are still enmeshed in sin.

3) We have the commitment in the ministry of all the baptized to love and serve our neighbors – all our neighbors. This is a commitment to neighbor justice, both in the protection of the vulnerable and oppressed and in bringing justice to perpetrators of harm. It is an act of love to speak truth about the way we all participate in a culture of gender-based violence and to the fact that perpetrators of violence against people with devalued identities are overwhelmingly people with privileged identities. It is neither loving nor does it ultimately serve God or others to shy away from these facts.

Discussion questions

1. Consider whether it feels natural to you to think of women and girls as bearers of the Holy Spirit who reflect God's image in the world. If not, what gets in the way? What associations to female bodies do you most readily make?
2. Regardless of your gender, imagine someone you care about is troubled by a gender-based comment you have made. What might be the first emotion you would experience? First thought? Now, imagine releasing yourself to trust in God's grace covering all the sin in which you are bound up – there is no risk or danger, only ever-constant love in God's eyes. How are you freed to respond now?
3. What does it feel like to risk when we address perpetrators and perpetrator culture directly? What do we fear, and how do you think that is part of the system that keeps violence alive?

IV. WHAT THEN CAN WE DO AS PEOPLE OF FAITH? (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Take two minutes for everyone to brainstorm ideas about how to respond to the issue of gender-based violence. Write down ideas on a white board. Then take two minutes to compare the following suggestions with what your group named.)*

1. **Study and support the use of the ELCA's social message on "Gender-based Violence" and foundational documentation.**
2. **Celebrate and support the many ELCA-affiliated social ministry organizations and Lutheran Services in America that work to respond to and address all forms of gender-based violence, including against women and girls.**
3. **Seek to see and name what the realities of gender-based violence are.** As the church, we are called to open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to the afflicted and oppressed among us. This means not only the literal exposure of the faithful to difficult information and even to relationships with those most immediately hurt by gender-based violence. It also means preparing and empowering ourselves to be able to open our eyes, ears and hearts, without being overcome by these realities. Consider educational hours or service projects related to violence against women facilitated by trained mediators or others with experience in maintaining safe space and/or who could receive members afterward who are troubled.
4. **Work to create accountability in your community.** Engage trainings that support both men and women in how to hold one another more accountable in our mutual contributions to a climate of violence. Seek to learn strategies not only to see these contributions but also to recognize defenses in ourselves and others and to respond to those with compassion and nonjudgment.
5. **Positively influence the lives of young people and peers.** As parents, grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles and adult mentors, we are especially called to take responsibility in shaping our children's environments. We do this both actively and through our passivity. Take the time to listen to the lyrics of songs your children listen to, including the themes of the movies and shows they watch; look at the video games they play. Have conversations with your children in age-appropriate ways about what healthy ways of relating look like, both with peers who are same-sexed or same-gendered and differently so.

IN CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should conclude following summary, guide the closing prayer, and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

Violence of all kinds and against any life is a problem in our broken creation. Violence can be physical, sexual, psychological or emotional and can be experienced by anyone, but statistics are clear that women and girls experience tragically higher rates. Systems of violence, such as pervasive violence targeted against them, often operate invisibly or with tacit acceptance. These systems are especially insidious because in order to be effectively changed, they must be both recognized and named. Just as a physician needs to diagnose a disease in order to treat it, we must be willing to name sexism, racism and other systems of violence so that we can work to end them. We are communities of brokenness and sin, but we are empowered to acknowledge sin clearly and without fear. As Christians, we are freed to refrain from individual acts of violence and to resist powerful systems of violence for our own sake and for the sake of our neighbors.

Closing prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 131 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss5>.
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper**.
3. **This week, think about what you can do** with others to make a difference in your community about the roots and effects of gender-based violence.
4. **This week, notice** where you see, hear about, or talk about violence against women and girls and against people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Ask the questions: What is my prayer right there? What action should I take?
5. **This week, have a conversation** within your congregation or school to be prepared to serve people experiencing gender-based violence. Who are the professionals in your community to provide legal and practical care? In what ways does your congregation or school let people know members are prepared to help? Through sermons? Adult education? Signs in private places and bulletin inserts? (These are available at ELCA.org/justiceforwomen.)
6. **This week, reach out** to local agencies that provide professional care to victims/survivors and their families. Ask them what they need from local congregations. Consider regular collections of money, supplies, and toys to support the care they offer.

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 5

In order to go deeper on this issue use any of these activities:

1. **Study the ELCA's "Social Message on Gender-based Violence" and foundational documentation**, available at ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Gender-Violence, for reflection and action steps for individuals, congregations, schools, synods and organizations.
2. **Study the ELCA's "Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation,"** available at ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation.
3. **Use the ELCA learning modules on human trafficking** and commended by the social statement task force for personal or group education, available at ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Women-and-Justice/resources.
4. Go to ELCA.org/justiceforwomen for ELCA congregational and study resources on gender-based violence.
5. **Regularly discuss** the various facets of gender-based violence in your congregation.
6. **Partner with a local agency** that works to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
7. **Contact your state and federal lawmakers** to support legislation that supports the safety of all people, including women and children who are immigrants.
8. **Further study** the ways race and ethnicity affect gender-based violence. See, for example, doj.state.or.us/victims/pdf/women_of_color_network_facts_domestic_violence_2006.pdf.

ENDNOTES

¹ The ELCA's social message on "Gender-based Violence" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), 2.

² "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women," UN Women, February 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics," National Organization for Women, <http://now.org/resource/violence-against-women-in-the-united-states-statistic/>.

⁵ "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women," UN Women, updated February 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

⁶ "Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics," National Organization for Women, <http://now.org/resource/violence-against-women-in-the-united-states-statistic/>.

⁷ Melissa Jeltsen, "We're Missing The Big Picture On Mass Shootings," The Huffington Post, updated Sept. 15, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mass-shootings-domestic-violence-women_us_55d3806ce4b07addcb44542a.

⁸ Anonymous, "Survivor Stories," OXY Sexual Assault Coalition, <https://oxysexualassaultcoalition.wordpress.com/survivor-stories-2/>.

⁹ Katy Steinmetz, "Why Transgender People Are Being Murdered at a Historic Rate," *Time* Aug. 17, 2015, <http://time.com/3999348/transgender-murders-2015/>.

¹⁰ ELCA, "Gender-based Violence," 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹² See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YesAllWomen.

6

Why do words and images for God matter?


In our time together we will:

1. identify effects of predominantly male language for God.
2. discover how expansive language and imagery are scripturally rooted and theologically faithful.
3. discuss what expansive language and imagery about God might mean for us – and our neighbor.

OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

Welcome to a conversation on words and images for God. Language and images for God affect us deeply; they both shape and express our faith. No single image, name or phrase is capable of communicating the fullness of God. Together, we will learn about the sources for **EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY** for God (diverse and multiple human and non-human language and imagery) and discuss what this diversity tells us about the God of faith. The task force is not of one mind on language for God. With this module it seeks to invite the whole ELCA into conversation with diverse facets of Scripture and Christian faith in order to explore and express faith from a variety of perspectives.

Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike? ... Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me. (Isaiah 46:5,9)

Moment of silent reflection
I. HOW DO WORDS AND IMAGES SHAPE AND AFFECT US?

(10 MINUTES)

Words and images are profoundly powerful.

*(Note to leaders: Invite participants to take one minute to:

1. Recall one experience in which a symbol or a word served to heal or hurt them.
2. Write down at least one way they felt.

Then ask participants to take one minute to review the list of statements (in the sidebar) about language, drawn from social linguistic research.

Participants can mark the statements that match their own experience.

Take no more than two minutes to hear very brief comments from a few people about the following questions.

What rang true for you in this chart? In what ways is language powerful?)

Language and images about God affect faith.

**(Note to leaders: Read or summarize the following introduction.)*

If everyday language is so powerful, think about religious language, in particular, language and images for God. Words and images about God matter a great deal because they express understandings of who God is. Scripture is full of a variety of images and language about God. They are not literal, and sometimes they are downright paradoxical.

Language and images about God also affect our understanding of ourselves, both as individuals and as communities.

**(Note to leaders: Divide the group in half and have one group read the first two stories and the other group read the third story. After reading their stories, groups discuss the discussion questions. Gather as a large group and take about three minutes to hear short answers from a few people.)*

When we listen to the needs of others in the body of Christ, how can we be pastoral? How can we proclaim God's love?

While walking home after work, Ruth was raped by a stranger posing as a jogger. She was a teenager. Days afterward, he called her house, bringing more terror to her parents. He was never apprehended. Fear and anger covered her and her family. Many images of God fed them in their grief. Now an adult, Ruth is one of many survivors of violence who say that predominantly male-identified language and images of God hurt. Instead, she experiences God's love and healing through God as woman, God as mother, God like her.²

A man in prison was visited by a young pastor who had been assigned there by his seminary. The pastor tried to console the man by assuring him of the love of God the Father. The man stopped the pastor. "Don't talk to me about a father's love. I only saw my father a few times in my life, and each time he beat me. He abused me and my mother and my sisters and brothers. That's what I know of fathers."³

With great joy, we gathered for the baptism of our granddaughter, Hannah. Though I believe Scripture's promise that Hannah is created in the image of God, I was troubled that her baptismal service included only male and neutral language for God. Yes, I know the theological and ecumenical reasons for baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; still I wondered why other parts of the liturgy didn't include more expansive images for God (Mother of all life; Holy Wisdom calling us to her table).

Language and images or symbols

- create power dynamics.
- express truth.
- hurt people.
- heal people.
- shape our understandings of the world and ourselves.
- influence people at an early age.
- are learned by rote in religious rituals before we understand their meanings.¹

And then I wondered: Would it be so surprising if Hannah were to struggle more than her older brother in seeing herself in the divine image? If the worship they experience uses mostly male pronouns and images to speak of God, wouldn't it be entirely possible for our grandson to carry a deeper sense that he bears God's image?

To be sure, incorporating more expansive images for God doesn't mean we abandon cherished prayers like the "Our Father." We simply find other places to incorporate female images – images from Scripture – so that all people, including Hannah, may more clearly hear the good news of God's love for them.⁴

II. WHAT LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY ABOUT GOD ARE IN SCRIPTURE? (15 MINUTES)

Scripture provides a variety of expansive language and images about God.

When we seek to proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ in ways that minister to many people, we can turn to Scripture and theology for resources.

**(Note to leaders: Divide the group into pairs or groups of three. Assign each group a list of verses, either 1-6 or 7-13. If the group is working without a hard copy of the entire study, make photocopies of the verses for handouts.)*

Invite groups to:

- 1. Skim the verses for a minute and notice how the images and language make you feel. Start to wonder why these particular feelings are evoked.*
- 2. Reflect on these questions together:*
 - What do you think these images say about God?*
 - What do you think these images say about humankind?*

After participants have read and discussed the verses, gather in a large group and hear short responses from a few people.)

1 “The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just.” (Deuteronomy 32:4a)

“You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.” (Deuteronomy 32:18)

“Indeed their rock is not like our Rock; our enemies are fools.” (Deuteronomy 32:31)

2 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1)

3 The LORD says to Israel of those who are wayward, “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them.” (Hosea 13:8)

4 Jesus says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” (Matthew 23:37)

5 “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ... Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:4,8)

(For the full text, see Luke 15:1-10.)

6 God says about Israel: “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I who took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” (Hosea 11:3-4)

7 “You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.” (Psalm 32:7)

8 Moses proclaims to all of Israel: “As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided [Jacob]; no foreign god was with him.” (Deuteronomy 32:11-12)

9 “As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.” (Psalm 123:2)

10 God says: “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept myself still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant.” (Isaiah 42:14)

11 God says to Israel: “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth; carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.” (Isaiah 46:3-4)

12 God says: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Isaiah 49:15)

13 God says: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:13)

At times, gender roles are subverted or mixed in Scripture.

**(Note to leaders: Ask one or two people to read the following section aloud while the group follows along. Encourage participants to circle anything in the texts that strikes them about gender roles. This exercise should take no more than a few minutes.)*

1. Paul describes himself as a mother in labor.
"My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you," (Galatians 4:19)
2. Jesus washes his followers' feet. (John 13:1-20)
"[Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him."
(John 13:4-5)

Biblical commentators have noted that the towel Jesus put on his waist was the symbol of those who washed other people's feet: Jewish wives and slave girls. Foot washing was done by females for males and symbolized a particular relationship of either marital service and intimacy or servitude. Yet while foot washing was an act of hospitality, love and honor, it was simultaneously "an unequivocal signal of hierarchical power relationships." The husband does not do this for the wife. A Jewish male slave would not do this for anyone because of the problems of defilement, even though a slave. A free man would never wash another's feet.⁵

This subversion is exactly what is happening in the text. What Jesus does offends the disciples specifically because his activity is a female's role! Jesus disrupted accepted gender roles. Jesus was gender non-conforming and put on the symbol of these women, a towel at the waist. Even more scandalous, Jesus tells the disciples that they, too, should wash each other's feet!

As we move from Scripture to written and visual theology, keep these "gender paradoxes" in mind. You will have a chance to reflect on these in a few minutes.

III. IN WHAT WAYS HAVE THEOLOGIAN'S USED SCRIPTURE TO SPEAK ABOUT GOD? (7 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Skip this portion if you have less than one hour for the module. Invite someone to read the following quotations from theologians in the early church and during the medieval period. Point out that what they say is rooted in Scripture. Encourage participants to underline sections that attract their attention and circle anything that challenges traditional gender roles or ideas.)*

“Holy Divinity has lost her coins, and it is us!”

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)⁶
(based on Luke 15:8)

“But you, Jesus ... Are you not that mother who, like a hen collects her chickens under her wing? Truly master, you are a mother.”

St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) in Prayer 10 to St. Paul, “Opera Omnia” 3:33 and 39-41
(based on Matthew 23:37)

“A mother can hold her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother, Jesus, can lead us in friendly fashion into his blessed breast by means of his sweet open side.”

Julian of Norwich (1342-c. 1416) in “Revelations of Divine Love,” Chapter 60, para. 6
(based on Isaiah 46::3-4; 49:15)

“The Bridegroom, Christ ... has breasts, lest he be lacking any one of all the duties and titles of loving kindness. ... He is a mother, too, in the mildness of his affection.”

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) in “Sermons 2,” Second sermon for St. Peter and St. Paul, Chapter 2, 384-86
(based on Isaiah 49:15 and Mark 2:20)

Questions for discussion in the full group

The Scripture and expressions of faith you have studied here express paradoxes about gender roles and identities. Together, name at least three ways this might affect how we understand God.

IV. WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THE WAYS ARTISTS EXPRESS SACRED TRUTH IN IMAGES? (15 MINUTES)

Introduction

**(Note to leaders: Read or summarize the introduction for participants.)*

This portion of the module moves into visual experiences of images of God. The following images come from different artists in different parts of the world and different times in history. Some of them are from contexts where artwork in churches was a primary means of Christian education because people were largely non-literate. Images needed to communicate strongly about the church's understandings of God and Jesus Christ.

“I don't know what sort of power images have that they can so forcefully enter and affect one, and make everyone long to hear and speak in imagery.”

– Martin Luther⁷

Personal reflection:

**(Note to leaders: Read the following to participants: Before we move into seeing the images, you are invited to reflect for a minute. Unless you decide otherwise, you will not need to share your answer with anyone.)*

For what do you most yearn in God's relationship with you? You are invited to write down key words for yourself or draw anything that comes to mind. Hold on to your yearnings as you are introduced to some images.)

Visual images communicate truth.

**(Note for leaders:*

- 1. If possible, use the online PowerPoint slides with notes available at ELCA.org/womenandjustice. Otherwise, direct participants to Appendix B for a sampling of images for use in this activity. (This is a small sample of what is available online – and in museums, churches and excavations all over the world. For more images, visit ELCA.org/womenandjustice study's ELCA web page or search online.)*
- 2. First, go through the images without commentary, staying on each image about 10 seconds. Stress an invitation for everyone to open themselves to the images, keeping in mind what they most yearn for in God's relationship with them.*
- 3. The second time through the images, share the commentary found in the leader's guide to expand different understandings of them.)*

Reflect alone or in small groups

**(Note to leaders: After going through the images two times, provide time for participants to engage in reflection about these questions.)*

- 1. How do these images make you feel? What spoke to you in your yearnings for God, and why? Identify at least one image that speaks to you in a new way.*
- 2. What thoughts do these images evoke?*
- 3. If any of these images were used regularly in worship and study in your local congregation, what effect do you think they might have on worship and faith?*

V. IN WHAT WAYS DO LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY FOR GOD MATTER? (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: If you have one hour for this module, invite participants to share reading this text aloud and to answer question 1 below. Invite participants to use the rest of the questions during the next week and in future conversations. If you have more than an hour, engage in any or all of the discussion questions below, through personal journaling and/or group discussion.)*

In recent decades, Christian theologians have written much about inclusive and expansive language and images for God. Pastors and other church leaders have used expansive images and language about God in their preaching, teaching and ministry in order to communicate the Word of God in a variety of scripturally and theologically faithful images and language.

An important part of this theological work is naming how the use of almost exclusively male-identified (**ANDROCENTRIC**) language and images is theologically problematic and pastorally harmful. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson suggests three ways that using predominantly male language for God can be harmful.

First, because exclusively male images offer no alternatives, they get taken literally. The use of male language alone leads us to forget the incomprehensible mystery of God and can reduce the living God to an understanding of God as an infinitely powerful man. This is poor theology about God.

This literalism can also lead to the unwarranted idea that maleness has more in common with God than femaleness. Exclusively male images imply that women are somehow less like God or are more distant from God than males are. This is poor theology about humanity.

Second, the effect of taking masculine images of God literally can lead to idolatry. Prophets have long insisted on the need to turn away from idols, gods who are not true. God is not literally a father or a king or a lord, just as much as God is not literally a rock or a hen or a woman in labor. God is ever so much greater!

Third, the exclusive use of patriarchal language for God has powerful social effects, functioning to justify patriarchy in church and society. In other words, if God is understood as male and women are seen as less than men, it becomes easy to justify attitudes and behaviors that discriminate against and devalue women and girls. However, Scripture and Christian theology witness to an understanding of God that transcends gender, and they offer us life-giving ways to proclaim the gospel so that all may hear and all may share life in equal measure.⁸

Module 6: Why do words and images for God matter?

If you have one hour for your session, shout out brief answers to this question and list them up front:

1. In what ways do you think language and imagery about God matter?

In addition, if you have more than one hour for your session, spend some time journaling about and/or discussing these questions in small or large groups:

1. In what ways do you suppose predominantly male language might get in the way of the proclamation of the gospel for some people? In other words, in what ways might language harm our neighbor? In what ways might language heal and care for our neighbor?
2. Why do you think Christians sometimes are uncomfortable talking about language for God? What might we gain through openness to new language and imagery? What are we afraid we might lose?
3. What might happen in your congregation if your worship services had more female images for God? What might happen in your own heart? Why do you think you or your congregation would have these thoughts or feelings? If possible, identify specific suggestions to enrich your community's worship language and imagery.

IN CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: The leader should gather the group and read the following summary, use the closing exercise (below), guide the closing prayer, and point participants to the out-the-door activities.)*

What have we learned?

Language and imagery for God that is exclusively or nearly exclusively male-identified have negative effects for faith and for people. Although most Christian liturgy uses predominantly androcentric language and imagery, expansive language and imagery is scripturally rooted and theologically faithful. The paradoxes and multiplicity of language and images about God communicate something important about the mystery and intimacy of the Triune God.

Closing exercise

**(Note to leaders: Invite participants to use one word to answer: How do you feel as you leave this module?)*

Closing prayer **(See Devotional Options.)*

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 133 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss6>.
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper**. Visit the online site for suggested further reading and additional images at ELCA.org/womenandjustice.
3. **This week, think about these questions:** How might expansive imagery and language for God affect 1) the proclamation of the gospel? 2) how we understand the Triune God? 3) how we understand ourselves and the rest of creation?
4. **This week, talk with others** about the discussion questions in section V in this module.
5. **This week, notice language and imagery** in worship and Bible study. Come back next week to share what you noticed.
6. **This week, notice places where there is a need for practices** of neighbor justice around language and images for God and ask the questions: What is my prayer right there? What action should I take?

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 6

If you want to see Christian language and imagery in practice: Analyze your congregation's hymnal and other worship resources according to gender. You could also look for the ways the words and images have messages about race, ethnicity, age and ability. As part of taking stock of your community's worship resources, have open conversations among those who worship. What do you each experience and think because of the language in your worship services? Do the same with your congregation's Christian education resources, for all ages.

If you want to explore and discuss more images of Jesus Christ: Use the larger collection of slides available online. The slides contain commentary. As you work through them, discuss these questions.

Reflection alone or in small groups

1. How do these images make you feel? What spoke to you in your yearnings for God and why? Identify at least one image of God that speaks to you in a new way.
2. What do you think any of these images say about God? about humankind?
3. If any of these images were used regularly in worship and study, what do you think they might mean for your local community of faith? for the whole ELCA?
4. How do these images matter to you? How might they matter to your neighbor in Christ?
5. When you think about what these images say about humankind, think about the heavy emphasis on God as mother. Women in the ancient world were primarily portrayed as mothers. Notice how this emphasis in Scripture affects both our understanding of God as our source – as generative and sustaining – but also how it might limit our understanding of what it means to be a woman or girl. Think, for instance, of the fact that women in Scripture were also queens, patrons, disciples and judges – vocations and roles not tied to biological motherhood.

If you want to know more about views on neutral language for God: Some Christians use gender-neutral language for God, meaning that they try to avoid the use of any gender-specific pronouns. Sometimes, this practice is used particularly for the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. According to some theologians, using primarily gender-neutral language for God does not go far enough, because our minds still tend to default to the male language and imagery for God with which we are familiar.

If you want to know more about gender subversion in Scripture: There are a number of places in Scripture in which, for example, prophets, Jesus and Jesus' male followers are portrayed in ways that are not in "expected" or normative male roles. For example, God tells the prophet Jeremiah not to take a wife and have a family, dramatically contrary to the expected role of a Jewish man in his time.⁹ Paul compared himself to a mother giving birth. Jesus put himself in the role of a female slave or a wife when he washed his followers' feet.

Scripture also portrays women in ways that subvert gender expectations. For example, Deborah was a prophet and a judge who led the Israelites to victory over the Canaanites. Jael was celebrated as a hero for killing Sisera, the Canaanite general. The Syro-Phoenician woman challenged Jesus to expand his ministry beyond the Israelites. Phoebe was a deacon in the early church. Are these women's stories familiar to you? Why do you suppose we talk about the men of the Bible more than we do the women?

If you want to discuss how the expansive language and imagery for God in Scripture and the Christian tradition influence how we understand the Triune God:

One area of language about God that requires a great deal more dialogue is Trinitarian language. Within the early church, theologians identified Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the three persons of the Godhead, which we see in the Church's confession of faith in the ecumenical creeds and in the baptismal formula. These three terms appear frequently in the New Testament and come together in Matthew 28:19.

This Trinitarian language is challenging because of the practical implications of male-identified language for God on human understandings of God and of ourselves. Christians today have a variety of responses to this. Some do not want to see the traditional language change; others have rejected it in favor of female-identified language. Still others think that language about the Trinity can be justifiably flexible, sometimes male-identified, sometimes neutral and sometimes female-identified. Although there are strong opinions among those who hold opposing views, there are many people who welcome study, dialogue and discernment as faithful Christians seeking to hear the gospel and to live within the folds of the Trinitarian life.

The task force is not of one mind about this. However, the task force invites this church to engage reflectively on the effects of androcentric language on faith and on people of faith and to explore the rich variety of language recorded in Scripture and the Christian theological tradition.

ENDNOTES

¹ See Jean Berko Gleason and Nan Bernstein Ratner, eds. *The Development of Language*, 8th ed., Allyn & Bacon Communication Sciences and Disorders Series (Boston: Pearson Education, 2012); Jean Berko Gleason and Sandra Weintraub, "The Acquisition of Routines in Child Language," *Language in Society* 5 (2), 1976 (Cambridge University Press: 129–36). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4166866>; and Krista Tippitt, "Unfolding Language, Unfolding Life," <http://onbeing.org/program/unfolding-language-unfolding-life/transcript/408>. See also Kate Swift and Casey Miller, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing: For writers, editors and speakers*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse.com, Inc., 2000).

² This illustration was shared with a task force member.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This illustration is based on an actual incident involving members of the task force. Names have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

⁵ Ruth Habermann, "Gospel of John: Spaces for Women," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Luise Schotroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 673.

⁶ See John M. O'Loughlin and Francis Emmett Fitzgerald, "The Jerome Award Remarks at Prayer Breakfast Boston," *The Catholic Library World* 1-4 (2004): 44. See also Augustine's Exposition on Psalm 138, section 14.

⁷ Martin Luther, "Against Latomus," 1521, LW 32:196.

⁸ See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), esp. 90-112.

⁹ See Corrine Carvalho, "Whose Gendered Language of God? Contemporary Gender Theory and Divine Gender in the Prophets," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 43. No. 3, (2016), <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/issue/view/4>.

7

How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

OPENING ACTIVITIES (UP TO 10 MINUTES)

This module explores the subject of how Lutherans interpret the Scriptures. Module 1 considered neighbor-justice as a way of reading the Scriptures, and Module 6 examined scriptural language and images of God. In this session we will reflect on how to understand Scripture passages that have been used to devalue or harm women and girls. Our question in Module 7 is: How do Lutherans interpret Scripture – especially the messy bits? Welcome to the conversation!



Opening prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Conversation covenant and module objectives *(Review both briefly.)

Scripture reading

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Word, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1.1-5, 14)

Moment of silent reflection

I. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? (5 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: Invite participants to think of a time when a scriptural passage was used to limit or harm someone they know. Invite them to turn to a partner and share the passage and how they felt. After a minute of sharing have everyone return their attention to the full group.)*

The Bible has been interpreted in many ways, by different people, in different contexts. Unfortunately, the Bible has often been misinterpreted in ways that are limiting and even destructive for women and girls.

Christians treasure the Scriptures because from these writings we hear the message of God's wondrous, saving acts – especially the liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus — and God's promise of a new creation in Christ. So, it is troubling for many Christians when the Scriptures are used in other ways that devalue and harm women and girls, compromising the promise of a new creation in Christ.

In our time together we will:

1. discuss the problem that the Bible has been misinterpreted to devalue and harm women.
2. distinguish between what a text says and what it means for us today.
3. explore how the gospel of Jesus Christ functions for Lutherans as the central way to interpret the Scriptures.
4. practice how to listen well for what the Word of God means for us today.

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

For example:

- Even though all the Gospels identify women as the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, some people use other scriptural passages to silence the voices and witness of women and girls in the church.
- Even though the Old Testament tells us that both women and men are created good and in God's image and even though the New Testament repeatedly affirms that God's mercy in Christ opens a place for all regardless of social identity or location, including race and gender, some people use other scriptural passages to devalue women and girls and to deny them equal standing in the church and society.
- Even though the entire Scriptures uphold the two-fold commandment to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself and direct all Christians to live respectfully with others, some people use other scriptural passages to excuse and legitimize violence against women and girls.

Faithful Christians are right to be concerned and seek a remedy to these misuses of the Scriptures.

II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

(10 MINUTES)

**(Note to leaders: All of the following passages are from ancient religious texts. As each is read each out loud, invite participants to mark a Y or N next to the ones they think are from the Bible. Y (Yes: in the Bible) or N (No: not in the Bible).)*

- If a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil.
- Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.
- Women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.
- If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall give the marriage present for her, and make her his wife.
- It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.
- Woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

*(Note to leaders: Ask participants to share brief responses to this exercise. Then lead a discussion of the following questions.)

How did these passages make you feel? What helped you determine if each passage was in the Bible or not?

As a matter of fact, all of these statements are found in the Bible.¹ Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

Many biblical texts, as well as texts from other ancient religious writings, originated in patriarchal cultures. These texts often say things about women and girls that we find problematic today. It is important to recognize that the Bible also says other things that many Christians today do not consider relevant for us anymore, such as prohibitions about eating pork² and shellfish³ or cross-breeding cattle or crops.⁴

It's clear what the Bible says. It's less clear what these passages mean for us today. Such texts are especially challenging to us because the Bible is regarded as the Word of God and thus holds a place of authority among Christians. How do we decide when, whether and how specific scriptural passages are still relevant for us today?

III. WHAT IS THE “WORD OF GOD,” AND HOW DO LUTHERANS INTERPRET SCRIPTURE? (10 MINUTES)

How do Lutherans understand the “Word of God”? The “Confession of Faith” in the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America identifies three complementary understandings of the Word of God. We confess:

- “Jesus Christ is the *Word of God incarnate*, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
- “The *proclamation of God’s message to us as both Law and Gospel* is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- “*The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* are the written Word of God. Inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.”⁵

For Lutherans, the Word of God is much more than words printed on a page. The Word of God is living and active. When proclaimed, the Word

both reveals to us our brokenness and offers us God's love and grace. When we speak about the Scriptures as inspired by God, this refers not only to the activity of the Holy Spirit when the Scriptures were first written but also to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures in the life of the church. We trust that God is still speaking to us through the Scriptures!

Because the Word of God is first and foremost Jesus Christ himself, Lutherans practice a Christ-centered **BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC** (method of interpretation). As Martin Luther wrote, "The gospel itself is our guide and instructor in the Scriptures."⁶ We should read the Scriptures, Luther said, expecting that in them we will encounter the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as a gift for us. When we read the written Word, we do so with our attention focused on Christ the living Word, and we do so for the sake of speaking and hearing the Word today – a Word for all people regardless of gender, ethnicity or social and economic class.

New Testament scholar Diane Jacobson explains that at the core of this Lutheran hermeneutic is an emphasis on the **efficacy of the Word**, that is, what it does.⁷ The Lutheran Confessions identify the Word, along with the sacraments, as means of grace. This means that God works actively through the Word (and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion) for our benefit.

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

What does this mean in practice? Here are three ways of describing a Lutheran, Christ-centered hermeneutic. These are "lenses" we can look through to focus our attention on the central, saving message of the Scriptures.

**(Note to leaders: Direct participants to circle the words that catch their attention as these paragraphs are read or summarized aloud.)*

Distinguishing between law and gospel is a Lutheran practice that keeps the gospel promise of God's mercy in Christ from being confused with the demands of God's law. It seeks to preserve Christ as the embodiment and enactment of God's mercy and to prevent Christ from being turned into a lawgiver and judge.

Distinguishing between law and gospel is not only a way of understanding what a specific scriptural passage says objectively; it is also a way of discerning how that passage is heard, either as good news or as bad

news. To give an example, the statement “God loves you” is objectively gospel, or good news. However, to someone who feels guilty or unworthy, the statement “God loves you” can actually reinforce feelings that one is not worthy of God’s love.

“What proclaims Christ” expresses a Lutheran commitment to use the Scriptures in a way that conveys their life-giving authority today. Left to our own devices, humans tend to read the Bible through legalistic lenses, as a rule-book for how to live a God-pleasing life. Luther described the problem with this approach to the Scriptures by saying that it turns Christ into a newer and better Moses. Instead, we should interpret the Scriptures in a way that bears witness to the promise of new life in Christ. The fifth article of the Augsburg Confession (one of the Lutheran Confessions) says that when the gospel is preached as the promise of good news in Christ, the Holy Spirit works faith in those who hear it.

“Scripture interprets Scripture” is the Lutheran principle that this gospel promise – what preaches Christ – is the key to interpreting all of Scripture. When scriptural passages are unclear, or when they seem to contradict each other, they should be interpreted in light of the central message of God’s mercy in Christ. Even when a text itself is primarily an expression of God’s law, the Lutheran way to preach on the text and apply it to daily life is within the context of the good news of Jesus Christ who has fulfilled God’s law for us. When we let Scripture interpret Scripture, the law is never the last word!

To give an example, this principle helps explain why the ELCA and many other Lutheran churches have chosen to ordain women as pastors. Scriptural passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 – “Women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” – are interpreted in light of the Christ-centered perspective expressed in Galatians 3:27-28 – “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Optional activity: Using Lutheran principles of interpretation

**(Note to leaders: If you have time, use this exercise using Lutheran principles of interpretation. Invite participants to form groups of two or three. Have someone in the group identify one of the texts or situations they had in mind earlier where we identified how someone was limited or harmed by the misuse of Scripture. Have members use the following questions to talk about the meaning of the passage together.)*

- Was the passage in question used as law or gospel?
- How was (or wasn't) the promise of Christ conveyed in this situation?

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct,² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.³ Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing;⁴ rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.⁵ It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands.⁶ Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.⁷ Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

(1 Peter 3:1-7)

- Use “Scripture interprets Scripture” to identify one or more Scripture passages that bring the message of God’s new creation in Christ to reinterpret the passage that was used to harm. How does this interpretation bring a healing, liberating or reconciling word or message for women and girls in the situation that you had identified earlier?

**(Note to leaders, if you have time, gather the group and ask a few participants to share examples from their small-group discussion. Together, brainstorm a list of some empowering biblical texts that show forth Christ and preach the gospel against sexism, abuse and discrimination.)*

IV. HOW DO WE LISTEN FAITHFULLY? (20 MINUTES)

Listening to varied perspectives

1 Peter 3:1-7 is one example of the **household codes** found in the New Testament. Other examples are found in Colossians 3:18–4:1; Ephesians 5:22–6:9; and Titus 2:2–10. Codes like these were common in the ancient world as advice about proper behavior for the members of a household in that society: husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

**(Note to leaders: Divide participants into small groups of three to four people. Direct them to close their eyes and listen while someone reads 1 Peter 3:1-7 out loud. Then direct each group to use the following questions, as you keep track of time.)*

Discuss initial reactions to this text. How did the text make you feel? How does this text illustrate some of the gender roles and assumptions that we have discussed in earlier sessions? Did this text function as law or gospel for you as you heard it read? (3-5 minutes)

Now think about the text from different perspectives. In the first module of this study on faith, sexism and justice, we were introduced to the idea of neighbor-justice as a way of reading the Bible. As you listen to the text from 1 Peter being read aloud a second time, try to listen with the ears of your neighbors:

- How do you think you would hear this text if you were single?
- If you were in a same-sex relationship? If you were in a heterosexual relationship?
- If you were divorced?
- If you were a teenager?
- If you were in an abusive relationship?
- If you were married to someone who is not Christian?
- How do you think you would hear it if you were from an ethnic community other than your own? (African Descent, American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian, Middle Eastern, European Descent, etc.)

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

Share some of your thoughts with other members of your small group. Then talk about what you learned from trying to listen to the Scriptures with the ears of your neighbor (5-7 minutes). (For more on women in Scripture and reading Scripture together, see Going Deeper.)

Considering historical context

**(Note to leaders: Gather the group and read or summarize together the paragraphs below. Conclude with open sharing about the “aha” question found at the end.)*

This exercise in hearing the Scriptures with the ears of our neighbors helps us recognize that the Bible does not speak to everyone in the same way. This is true not only with respect to our individual circumstances but also with respect to the time and place in which we live.

We often talk about the Christian community as “the communion of saints” (Apostles Creed) or “a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). The Christian community exists across time as well as space. We are part of the same body of Christ as our Christian sisters and brothers who lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

If we want to listen to the Scriptures with the ears of our neighbors from earlier time periods, it is important to know about the historical contexts in which they lived, as well as the historical contexts in which the Scriptures were written. How would the people to whom 1 Peter was addressed have heard and understood this passage?

Biblical scholars believe that 1 Peter was written by Silvanus (also known as Silas) to a church of Jewish Christians in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) around 80-90 AD.⁹ Christianity was a minority religion in that area and was viewed with suspicion by the wider society. It was seen as foreign, with strange religious practices that differed from the norms of the Roman Empire. In the past, other foreign religions had come to the area and caused problems. For example, the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis upset the established social order because it empowered women and slaves who, according to the cultural norms of the time, should have remained submissive. The cult of Dionysus or Bacchus – the god of wine and fertility – was also seen as leading good Roman women astray.

In this cultural context, it was feared that the Christian belief in equality after baptism (Galatians 3:28) would cause similar social unrest if Christian wives and slaves refused to worship the Roman gods of their husbands and masters and desired emancipation. Scholars believe that these Christians were facing social discrimination, including harassment, arrest, imprisonment and even death. 1 Peter was written not only to encourage

these Christians in their trials and sufferings but also to provide them with practical advice for easing their relationships with civil authorities and within society. Understood in this way, the household codes were a life-giving help to a persecuted Christian community.

Understanding the historical context of this letter helps us to recognize that the household codes were written as specific advice to specific Christian communities at specific times and places. They were not intended to establish a timeless, universal set of gender roles and norms, any more than God's instructions to Noah about the precise measurements for the ark were intended as a timeless, universal ship-building blueprint.

Martin Luther captures the critical importance of interpretation that is faithful in this way:

"From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day. ... You must keep your eye on the word that applies to you, that is spoken to you.

"The word in Scripture is of two kinds: the first does not pertain or apply to me, the other kind does. And upon that word which does pertain to me I can boldly trust and rely, as upon a strong rock. But if it does not pertain to me, then I should stand still. The false prophets pitch in and say, 'Dear people, this is the word of God.' That is true; we cannot deny it. But we are not the people. God has not given us the directive."¹⁰

Conversation questions:

What was the greatest (most significant) "aha" for you listening to Scripture's historical context? Name one way that your realization affects the meaning of Scripture for women and girls. (Or: Name one way your realization positively affects women's and girls' lives.)

IN CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

In this conversation we have explored how the church's interpretation of some biblical passages has contributed to the oppression of women and girls. We have investigated how the ELCA understands the meaning of the Word of God and reads the Scriptures together in a way that holds Jesus Christ and his unconditional love and mercy at the center. We have touched on the importance of hearing multiple life perspectives and the historical context in order to “keep your eye on the word that applies to you, that is spoken to you.” (Luther, see just above.) We have practiced listening faithfully to the Spirit speaking in Scripture that lifts up the value of women and girls because in Christ there is no longer male and female, but all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Closing prayer *(See Devotional Options.)

Out the door

1. **Complete the response form** found on page 135 or online at <https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=wjss7>.
2. Use this module's **Going Deeper**.
3. **This week notice** situations where people need to hear the good news of the gospel, and ask yourself: What is my prayer right there? What action should I take on behalf of the neighbor?
4. **Think about** who else can be an effective partner with you in this faithful interpretation and use of the Scriptures.
5. **Learn and share:** Use the task force resource on scriptural interpretation found at ELCA.org/womenandjustice. It is based on a paper by Erik Heen, a member of the task force.
6. **Learn and reflect:** Pay attention to when you see or hear references to the Scriptures this week – not only in church but in casual conversation, in the media, on bumper-stickers and in Facebook memes, etc. Use the Lutheran principles of biblical interpretation to reflect on your observations. Is the Bible being used as a source of rules (law) or as promise (gospel)? Is the saving work of Christ an explicit part of how the Scriptures are being used?

GOING DEEPER FOR MODULE 7

If you want to know more about Jesus' beliefs about women and his view of households, consider these examples:

*Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42*¹¹ (Invite a participant to read): Jesus and his disciples were visiting the household of Martha. Martha was working in the kitchen and serving her guests, consistent with women's role. Her sister was breaking the gender norms; she was out with the men, sitting near Jesus, listening as he taught. In the end, Jesus not only welcomed Mary's presence with the men, but also actively supported her decision to break with the social rules and not spend the visit serving. Later Jesus took on the role of a female servant and washed the feet of his disciples.

*Jesus's own traveling household in Luke 8:1-3*¹² (Invite a participant to read): Whereas social norms prohibited women from traveling away from their homes and male protectors, Jesus traveled not only with 12 male disciples but also with a group of women patrons who provided for them out of their own means, including Johanna, wife of Chuza, an influential courtier – who far from submitting to her husband, had left their household to travel around the countryside with Jesus and a band of men. How does 1 Peter 3:1-7 connect with texts of Jesus' interactions with women and practices regarding households and with the overall biblical story?

If you want to know more about how Lutherans interpret the Scriptures: Visit the web pages for the ELCA's Book of Faith initiative at www.bookoffaith.org to find significant help on this subject. That initiative lifts up four approaches to reading the Scriptures: historical, literary, theological and devotional. In addition, Lutheran New Testament scholar Mark Allan Powell in "Opening the Book of Faith" identifies five key Lutheran principles for interpreting the Bible that should find their way into the reading and interpretation of the Bible for our times.¹³ These are:

- Law and gospel
- What shows forth Christ
- Scripture interprets Scripture
- The plain meaning of a text
- Public interpretation

If you want to know more about the problem of women's voices in the Scriptures:

The Bible was written long ago in a **patriarchal** context that valued men more than women. One effect of this is that there is far more male representation than female representation in the Bible. Lindsay Hardin Freeman reports in her book, "Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter" that:

- Although there are many named men in the Bible, we are only told the names of 49 women.
- There are only 93 women who are allowed to speak in the Scriptures.
- Of the 93 women given voice, they speak collectively 14,056 words (which is roughly only 1.1 percent of the total words in the Bible).¹⁴

Question for reflection: Are these statistics surprising to you? How does this make you feel? What message does this give to young girls and boys today? What can we do about this?

If you want to practice what it would mean to have many different women

interpreting Scripture together: Biblical scholar Sharon Ringe asserts that Christians should interpret Scripture from within a “Chorus of interpretation.” This is important because all of us come to the Bible with our own conditioning, biases and perspective. As an important counter to the lack of women’s voice in Scripture she encourages practicing interpretation “done as a community project, where the voices of many different women – poor women and rich women; white women and women of color ... can all be heard.”¹⁵ Try this role-playing exercise with this in mind.

Individuals are assigned or choose one of the interpreters below. Each group should have one member representing each character – all characters are women – who step into the character’s shoes as the group reads and thinks about one of these household codes: Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1; Titus 2:2–10; and 1 Peter 3:1–7.

- **Olivia Nielsen** – a biracial 15-year-old Lutheran confirmand. She grew up attending an ELCA congregation in rural Wisconsin with her Norwegian-American mother. Her biological father is African-American, but she has never met him. Whenever topics of diversity, racism or African-American culture come up in her church youth group discussions she is called upon to respond. This is embarrassing and painful for her. She doesn’t know what to say. She just wants to fit in and she experiences this as her being labeled as “other.”
- **Nadia Salem** – a 31-year-old Arab-American Lutheran youth worker. She grew up in Palestine and attended the Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, until her family moved to Michigan when she was 15. People often find it ironic that “a former Muslim” teaches confirmands and leads a youth group – in fact, Nadia’s family has never been Muslim, and they can trace their Christian roots in Palestine back to the time of Christ.
- **Isa Bauer** – a 47-year-old Cuban-American classical pianist. She grew up in a non-practicing Catholic home and converted to the ELCA due to marrying a German-American Lutheran. After they had their third child, she found touring and night shows to be difficult to juggle and took a break from her career (something that has been a painful choice for her). Lately she’s become very interested in mujerista theology and is considering applying to Trinity Lutheran Seminary to study church music.
- **Eleanor Thompson** – a 52-year-old ELCA pastor and womanist theologian. Her father’s family is said to have been Lutheran in America since the 1800s and her mother joined after marrying him. Eleanor grew up Lutheran, attending Luther College and then the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Time and again her parishioners and clergy colleagues assume that she is “new” to the ELCA and has less connection to and proficiency in the Lutheran tradition than they do.

Invite anyone who played Olivia, if they would like, to share a brief insight. Repeat with those who played Nadia, Isa and Eleanor.

ENDNOTES

¹ Answer key:

- If a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. (1 Corinthians 11:6)
- Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. (Ephesians 5:22-23)
- Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)
- When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give bride-price for her, and make her his wife. (Exodus 22:16)
- Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (1 Corinthians 7:1-2)
- When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her. (Deuteronomy 25:5)
- Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provide they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Timothy 2:15)

² Deuteronomy 14:8: "And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses."

³ Leviticus 11:12: "Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you."

⁴ Leviticus 19:19: "You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials."

⁵ The Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Section 2.02. Emphasis added.

⁶ Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels," 1522, *LW* 35:123.

⁷ Diane Jacobson in "Some Helpful Ways to Read the Bible" available at <http://bookoffaith.org/pdf/Some%20Helpful%20Ways%20to%20Read%20the%20Bible-3.pdf>.

⁸ Some examples of passages that the leader might wish to review in advance of this conversation are:

- the Gospel accounts of the women who were witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (for example, Luke 24:1-12);
- Luke's record of Mary's praise of God's liberating mercy in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55);
- the well-known passage that describes how incorporation into Christ's life ends exclusions based on race, gender, social location, etc. (Galatians 3:23-29); and
- the promise of a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

⁹ See David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Codes in 1 Peter* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," (1525), *LW* 35:170.

¹¹ Luke 10:38-42: Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

¹² Luke 8:1-3: Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

¹³ Mark Allan Powell, bookoffaith.org/biblemethods.html.

¹⁴ Lindsay Hardin Freeman, *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter* (Forward Movement, 2014).

¹⁵ Sharon Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2012), 5-6.

GLOSSARY

ABLEISM: The systematic discrimination, exclusion and oppression of people with mental and physical disabilities.

AGENCY: The capacity, condition or state of acting or of exerting power.

ANDROCENTRIC: Focused or centered on men.

BIAS: This term refers to prejudice in favor of or against a person or group and is often unfair or based on stereotypes. Bias can be implicit or affect decisions and assessments in an unconscious manner. Descriptive bias has to do with the way we describe large and diverse groups of people in oversimplified generalizations. Prescriptive biases are based on assumptions about how women and men should act and be in the world.

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS: Hermeneutics refers to the study of interpretation and interpretation methods. There are many methods for interpreting or understanding Scripture.

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

CISGENDER OR GENDER-CONFORMING: This is an umbrella term for those whose gender expression and gender identity are congruent with their biological characteristics or the gender they were assigned at birth. This term generally applies to anyone who is not transgender. (See also transgender.)

COVENANT: This is an agreement or promise, often of a formal nature. In Scripture, there are many covenants, but the most prominent covenants are between God and God's people.

DISCERNMENT: A term used to indicated the process of listening for God's Word to us.

DOMINANCE: A word that refers to holding power or superiority over others.

EQUALITY: The state of all people being equal or the same or having the same ability or resources to meet a challenge. This especially refers to rights or opportunities.

EQUITY: Fairness or justice in the way people are treated that is not dependent on uniformity and might take several factors into account.

EXEGESIS: A critical explanation or interpretation of a text. In this study, this refers to scriptural texts.

EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY: Inclusive language refers to the inclusion of all genders when referring to humanity or God. Expansive language for God also includes language and imagery that is not limited to what is human. The Bible includes examples of both inclusive and expansive language.

FEMINIST THEOLOGY: A theological approach shaped by the experience of women and that puts the well-being of women and girls at the center of expressions of faith. Sometimes the term is applied in a generic sense to any writing that supports the well-being of women and girls, but in the United States it specifically describes theological work done by, for example, Euro-American, Asian, American Indian and some Black women. (See also *mujerista* and *womanist* theology.)

GENDER NON-CONFORMING: The term refers to people whose gender identity, gendered way of acting in the world and biological characteristics do not completely fit with the dominant and expected ways of acting as a man or a woman. There are many identities and experiences included under the umbrella of gender non-conforming, for example, those born with ambiguous genitalia or those who do not express their gender in expected ways.

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

HETERONORMATIVE: A belief system that treats heterosexual attraction and relationships as the superior way of being.

HETEROSEXISM: The systematic discrimination, exclusion and oppression of people who are not heterosexual. This includes the presumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexual orientations.

HYPER-MASCULINITY: A term for exaggerated masculine behavior or traits that emphasizes physical strength, aggression and sexuality.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Human identities that are tied to systemic privilege and oppression can intersect with one another and thus shape the unique ways that people experience aspects of life. These identities have to do with sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, race, ethnicity, nationality/citizenship, social class, economics and religion, to name a few. For example, this means that the gender-based violence and oppression experienced by a lesbian woman of color will be different than that experienced by an economically impoverished gender non-conforming white person. All human identities and all forms of privilege and oppression are made up of many intersections.

INTERSEX: A term that can refer to a variety of conditions in which a person is born with sexual anatomy or reproductive organs that do not fully fit the typical definitions of female or male.

JUSTICE: Generally, justice refers to an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment and reciprocity. When someone uses the word, that person may have a particular kind of justice in mind. Some of these include: retributive justice, corrective justice, distributive justice, restorative justice, structural justice, fair or equal treatment under the law, ending oppression based on power differences or biblical righteousness. In this document, the term justice emphasizes the latter half of these meanings but always with the biblical emphasis on justice as right relationship with God and within community.

JUSTIFICATION: The act of being made right with God. The central Lutheran teaching is that we are justified, or made right with God, by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

LAW AND GOSPEL: Law and gospel, also referred to as command and promise, are central principles used by Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions to interpret and apply the Scriptures. Both law and gospel are God's Word. The terms refer not only to the content of the Scriptures but to how God's Word affects us when we read or hear it. God's law addresses us in two ways or "uses." One provides direction for how we are to live in society; the other exposes our sinfulness and puts the old creature to death. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ which we receive through faith as the gift of forgiveness and new life.

LGBTQ: These letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. The term is an inclusive way of referring to a community of people or a person. Sexual orientation—gay, lesbian, bisexual—describes attraction. Gender identity—transgender and queer—refers to expressions of gender. Some other variations include LGBTQIA2 or LGBT.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A theological approach shaped by the experience of marginalized people and groups and committed to justice; it originated in Latin America among Christian communities. Liberation theology is informed by social analysis and is committed to action, sometimes referred to as liberative praxis.

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS: Documents written by Lutheran reformers during the 16th century that provide a foundation for Lutheran theology and practice. The first and primary Lutheran Confession for the ELCA is the Augsburg Confession. The other documents contained in the Book of Concord, including the Large and Small Catechisms, are also accepted as Confessional writings.

MALE PRIVILEGE: (See "privilege.")

MINDSET: A frame of reference or an established set of attitudes held by someone.

MISOGYNY: The dislike of or contempt for women; literally, it means hatred of women.

MUJERISTA THEOLOGY: A theological approach shaped by the experiences of Latina women. The term comes from "mujer," the Spanish word for woman. Mujerista theology is one type of liberation theology.

NEIGHBOR JUSTICE: A tool proposed in this study for scriptural interpretation that emphasizes seeking the neighbor's good for the sake of justice for all.

NORMATIVE: A word implying, creating, or prescribing a norm or perceived standard, especially related to behavior.

PATRIARCHY: The social, institutional, legal, political, educational, economic, religious and interpersonal systems of society that benefit men and the interests of men with status and power. While all people within a patriarchal system participate in it, the system functions with men at the center. This means that, sometimes unconsciously, people participate in systems that control and oppress women, girls, LGBTQ people and others who do not fit society's ideas of maleness and masculinity.

PRIVILEGE: Advantage or special treatment of a group or individual that is unearned.

SEXISM: Sexism is that which promotes the silencing, controlling and devaluing of women, girls and gender non-conforming people (see above) and perpetuates male privilege and power.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: Social justice refers to the idea that justice is not limited to the fair application of laws in individual cases but rather strives to attain a society characterized by equitable economic, political and civil opportunities for all people.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS: These are patterned series of interrelationships existing among individuals, groups and institutions and forming a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

SOLIDARITY: Solidarity recognizes a kinship within all of nature that issues from God's creative activity. It expresses the contention that the interests of the entire community of life should be legitimate concerns when decisions are made and actions evaluated.

SUBMISSION: This word refers to the action or fact of yielding to a superior force or to the authority of another person.

SUFFICIENCY: The principle of sufficiency obligates human beings to care for the basic needs of others and all other life forms. It is grounded in the belief that God provides abundance that is sufficient for all.

SUSTAINABILITY: Sustainability suggests provision of acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations.

TRANSGENDER OR TRANS: Someone whose own identity challenges the idea that gender is binary and derived innately from biological sex. This may describe someone whose gender identity does not match the identity typical of someone with certain biological characteristics or the gender that was assigned to them at birth. The term transgender may be used to include other identities.

VIOLENCE, GENDER-BASED: Gender-based violence is physical, sexual or emotional harm directed at a person in order to create or maintain power and control. While many different people, including men and boys, are affected by gender-based violence, the majority of victims are women and girls. Gender-based violence also includes intimate partner violence within same-gender relationships, as well as some forms of elder abuse.

VOCATION: In Lutheran theology, vocation (or calling) refers to God's call to all people to live responsibly in their roles within the world God has made, serving their neighbors within the areas of family, work and community life. All people have multiple callings that are lived out in various settings and relationships, for example as a student, a worker, a child, a parent, a citizen. As Christians, we are freed by the gospel and strengthened and renewed through our baptism for service in these particular activities or occupations.

WOMANIST THEOLOGY: A theological approach shaped by the experiences of black women. The word stems from author Alice Walker's use of the word "womanish" to refer to the lives of black women in the United States. Womanist theology is one type of liberation theology.

IMAGES FOR MODULE 6



Image 1

By Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia Courtesy of DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, DeGrazia Foundation, Tucson, Arizona. All rights reserved.



Image 2

Alexandre Hogue (1898-1994), *The Crucified Land*, 1939, Oil on canvas, GM 0127.2000, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK.



Image 3

Renata Sedmakova/Shutterstock.com



Image 4

© John Giuliani
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Image 5

Courtesy Mary Ann Klopfleisch/St. Jacob Lutheran Church, Anna, Ohio

Appendix B



Image 6

©Heiner Straesser - derPanoramafotograf.com



Image 7

Museum Mayer van den Bergh,
photo: Hugo Maertens



Image 8

The Bodleian Library, University of
Oxford, MS. Bodl. 270b, fol. 6r.



Image 9

Courtesy Scala/Art Resource, NY



Image 10

Courtesy St. Michael's Cathedral/Sitka National Historical Park

RESPONSE FORM

Why do we need to talk together?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
 - 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 1: Why do we need to talk together about women and justice?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What brings us here?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. How shall we talk together?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. Where should we begin?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on talking together?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on talking together?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

Please send the completed form to:
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Research and Evaluation
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4101

RESPONSE FORM

What problems do women face, and what does justice require?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
 - 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 2: What problems do women face and what does justice require?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What are the problems women confront?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. How are these problems related to justice?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. A God of promise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

Module 2: What problems do women face, and what does justice require?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on justice?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on justice?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

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RESPONSE FORM

How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
- 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What is sexism and how does it show up in my life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. How does sexism work?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. What is the effect of sexism on our bodies?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IV. How can we move forward together?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on personal sexism?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on personal sexism?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

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RESPONSE FORM

What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
- 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What are the basics that we should know about sex and gender discrimination in the workplace and broader economy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. How are sexism and gender and sex discrimination expressions of personal and social sin?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. How can Scripture and tradition empower us to resist sexism and gender and sex discrimination?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IV. How can Lutheran teachings about vocation help us advocate for justice in our common economic life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on economic sexism?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on economic sexism?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

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RESPONSE FORM

How can we address violence against women and girls?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
- 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What is gender-based violence?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. What gets in the way of addressing violence against women and girls?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. What gifts of faith help us address violence against women and girls?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IV. What then can we do as people of faith?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on violence against women and girls?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on violence against women and girls?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

Please send the completed form to:
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RESPONSE FORM

Why do words and images for God matter?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
 - 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 6: Why do words and images for God matter?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. How do words and images shape and affect us?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. What language and imagery about God are in Scripture?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. In what ways have theologians used Scripture to speak about God?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IV. What are some examples of the ways artists express sacred truth in images?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
V. In what ways do language and imagery for God matter?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Module 6: Why do words and images for God matter?

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on language and imagery?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on language and imagery?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

Please send the completed form to:
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Research and Evaluation
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4101

RESPONSE FORM

How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
- 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
I. What's the problem?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
II. What does the Bible say, and what does it mean?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
III. What is the "Word of God," and how do Lutherans interpret Scripture?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IV. How do we listen faithfully?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module?

7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module?

8. Based on your conversations during this module, what would you like our church (the ELCA) as part of Christ's body to say and do?

The form is complete – thank you!

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RESPONSE FORM

Overall Evaluation

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

2. What is the ZIP code?

3. Is this response from an individual or group?

- Individual
- Group: how many people are in the group?
 - 2 – 5
 - 6 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 or more

4. How valuable did you find this study in understanding women and justice?

	Not valuable	A little valuable	Moderately valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
Module 1: Why do we need to talk together?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 2: What problems do women face, and what does justice require?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 3: How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 4: What does economic sexism look like, and how can we see equity for all?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 5: How can we address violence against women and girls?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 6: Why do words and images for God matter?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module 7: How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Overall evaluation

5. What do you see as the greatest strength of this study?

6. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this study on Scripture?

7. What issues or topics do you feel were missing from this study on Scripture?

8. What would you like our church as Christ's body to say and do based on your conversations on this study?

The form is complete – thank you!

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