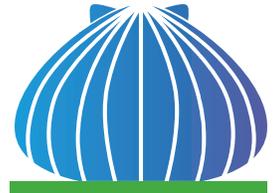


## 5

## 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."<sup>1</sup>

### 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.

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## 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

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.”<sup>7</sup>

“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.’”<sup>8</sup>

“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.”<sup>9</sup>

*\*(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.”<sup>10</sup>

## 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 campaign<sup>12</sup> 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** about the fact that perpetrators are overwhelmingly heterosexual men and boys.<sup>11</sup> 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 we 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Women-and-Justice/resources).
4. Go to [ELCA.org/justiceforwomen](http://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](http://doj.state.or.us/victims/pdf/women_of_color_network_facts_domestic_violence_2006.pdf).

## ENDNOTES

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

<sup>2</sup> "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>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>5</sup> "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>.

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

<sup>7</sup> 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](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mass-shootings-domestic-violence-women_us_55d3806ce4b07addcb44542a).

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

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

<sup>10</sup> ELCA, "Gender-based Violence," 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup> See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YesAllWomen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YesAllWomen).

## RESPONSE FORM

### How can we address violence against women and girls?

1. What is the name of your congregation, school, group or organization?

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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"/>

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

5. As a result of participating in this module, what did you learn?

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6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module on violence against women and girls?

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7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module on violence against women and girls?

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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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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