

## 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.

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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.

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\*(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.<sup>1</sup> 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 pork<sup>2</sup> and shellfish<sup>3</sup> or cross-breeding cattle or crops.<sup>4</sup>

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."<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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?

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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,<sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.<sup>3</sup> Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing;<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.)



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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.<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup>

### **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](http://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*<sup>11</sup> (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*<sup>12</sup> (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](http://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.<sup>13</sup> 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).<sup>14</sup>

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.”<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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)

<sup>2</sup> 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."

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

<sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Section 2.02. Emphasis added.

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

<sup>7</sup> 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>.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> 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

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.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Allan Powell, [bookoffaith.org/biblemethods.html](http://bookoffaith.org/biblemethods.html).

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

<sup>15</sup> 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.

## 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?

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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 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"/>

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**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?

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6. What do you see as the greatest strength of this module?

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7. What do you see as the greatest weakness of this module?

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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:  
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Chicago, IL 60631-4101