

1 **Draft for comment on a possible**

2 **ELCA Social Message on**

3 **Earth’s Climate Crisis**

4
5 “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”

6 —Psalm 24:1¹

7 “God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living
8 creature that is with you, for all future generations.’” —Genesis 9:12

9
10 **Introduction**

11 God gives a sacred responsibility to human beings in Genesis: to care for and “keep”
12 God’s creation for future generations. God made humans to be “keepers” of the garden, God’s
13 earth (Genesis 2:15).

14
15 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) first addressed this calling three
16 decades ago by pairing environmental and social justice in its social statement *Caring for*
17 *Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*.² That statement emphasizes the goodness of all creation,
18 humanity’s kinship with other creatures, and God’s promise for the fulfillment of all creation
19 (Ephesians 1:10). It also names climate change as a central environmental issue, one the ELCA
20 has addressed to varying degrees since 1993.³

21
22 Thirty years later, climate change poses grave dangers to present and future
23 generations. With this social message the ELCA provides facts, raises questions, draws on its
24 own social teaching, and identifies convictions that expansively address caretaking for climate.
25 At the heart of this social message lies the claim that climate change presents our generation
26 with a *kairos* moment; that is, a critical moment in time when decisive action is required.

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Read Genesis 1:14-31

²⁷ So God created humankind in [God's] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

²⁹ God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Read Genesis 2:4-15

⁴ In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there [God] put the man whom [God] had formed. ... ¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

1. How are Christians called to care for creation?

The foundational creation stories in Genesis 1-2 express God's love for creation and how God commands humans to participate in the creation God declares good.

Genesis 1 uses liturgical poetry to show us the beauty and goodness of each element of creation. God's first act of creation is abundant, life-sustaining light. Wondrously, the sun delivers enough energy every hour to supply humanity's energy needs for a year.⁴ The sun, earth, atmosphere ("firmament"), oceans, and all biological organisms, including humans and all species of plants and animals—each is declared beautiful and good in itself.

Genesis 1 portrays God creating the sun and moon with the task to rule (regulate and order) day and night. Similarly, God commands the seas and the earth to bring forth and sustain every kind of creature. Each kind—fish, bird, mammal, reptile, insect, and all others—has its own fertility and call to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth (Genesis 1:24-25).

As God transforms the earth from barrenness toward abundance, God chooses to make human creatures on the same day God creates other mammals—their kin. These human creatures share some tasks of the sun and the moon (to regulate and order the earth) and some tasks of the seas and earth (to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth) (Genesis 1:28).

72 God creates human beings as interdependent with the whole creation and gives humans
73 special responsibility as innovative stewards to contribute to the flourishing of creation. It is in
74 this sense that the human species is created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). The *imago*
75 *dei* is the human vocation, our calling, to participate in what God is already doing for the
76 earth—respecting and promoting the flourishing of creation.⁵

77

78 Sadly, the words in Genesis to “have dominion over” and “subdue” the earth (1:26, 28)
79 have been woefully misused to justify rapacious economic exploitation, human subjugation,
80 and racist notions of manifest destiny.⁶ That interpretation betrays and undermines why God
81 creates and how God acts in Genesis 1-2.

82

83 Both the Creator’s model of dominion in Genesis and the example of our Lord Jesus
84 teach us to serve others rather than dominate and degrade them. Created from the humus
85 (Genesis 2:7), human beings are given the responsibility to “keep” or care for the earth *just as*
86 God “keeps” and cares for us (Numbers 6:24-26). The Hebrew word *shamar*, translated as
87 “keep,” means to protect and sustain earth’s life for future generations.

88

89 Today this call to participate in God’s care for creation presents a particular
90 responsibility. Like the portrayal of sin’s entrance into creation in Genesis 3, the ELCA’s social
91 statement *Caring for Creation* reminds us that “[humans] have rebelled and disrupted
92 creation.”⁷

93

94 There is no greater evidence of God’s disrupted creation today than the huge changes
95 taking place in Earth’s atmosphere, which are producing unprecedented floods, heat waves,
96 droughts, and other climate and weather anomalies that are bringing suffering to communities
97 around the world.

98

99 **2. Why are changes in Earth’s atmosphere affecting our climate?**

100 Viewed from space, Earth’s atmosphere appears as a very thin and iridescent blue line
101 around the circumference of the planet. Over billions of years, this miraculous shield has
102 fostered a wondrous explosion of life on the land, in the sea, and in the air while also protecting
103 life from dangerous forms of solar radiation.

104

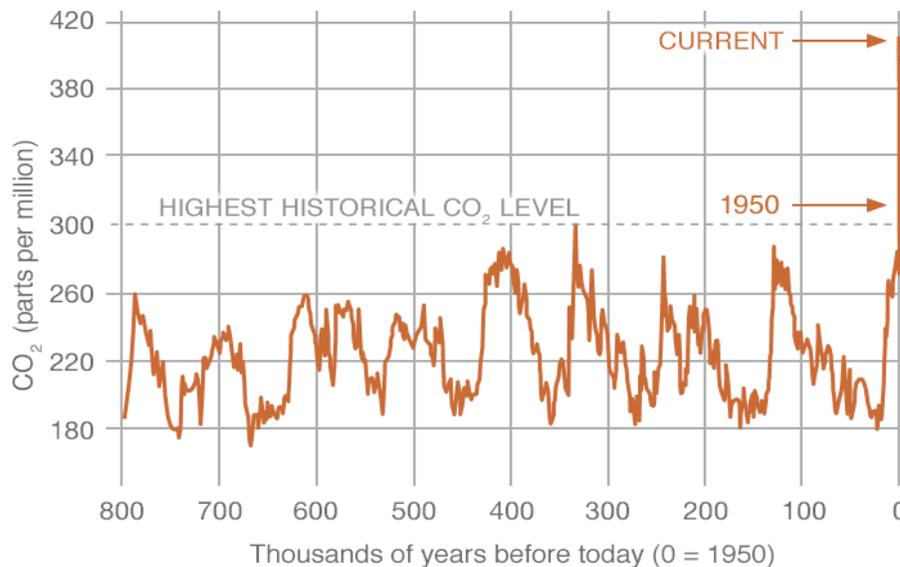
105 Photosynthesis by plants pulls carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere while releasing
106 oxygen for animals and humans to breathe, even as the plants provide food for them to eat.
107 Over hundreds of millions of years, much of the carbon dioxide that plants pulled out of the
108 atmosphere is now safely sequestered in fossil-fuel-rich sedimentary rock layers and peat-rich
109 soils.

110 Thanks to the fact that most of Earth’s carbon is stored in the ground rather than in the
111 atmosphere, the average temperature of Earth during all human civilization has been a
112 perfectly calibrated 14 degrees Celsius (57 degrees Fahrenheit). This is important because
113 carbon dioxide and other gases—water vapor, ozone, methane, and nitrous oxide—absorb
114 infrared radiation from the sun, retaining some of it but reemitting the rest to travel back out to
115 space .

116
117 This process is known as the “greenhouse effect.” We need the thin blanket provided by
118 these gases because, without it, Earth’s temperature would be -18 degrees Celsius (-0.4
119 degrees Fahrenheit).⁸ However, If the nations of the world add more blanket layers by
120 continuing to burn fossil fuels and releasing other greenhouse gases, Earth will heat up to a
121 dangerous temperature.

122
123 Over the last 800,000 years, the concentration of carbon dioxide in Earth’s atmosphere
124 naturally oscillated between 160-300 parts per million (ppm). During the entire course of
125 human civilization, over the past 10,000 years, concentration of carbon dioxide has been
126 relatively stable at around 280 ppm. Over the last 200 years, however, human activity has
127 increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by 50%. In June 2022, global
128 atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide reached a record 419 ppm. (Figure 1)

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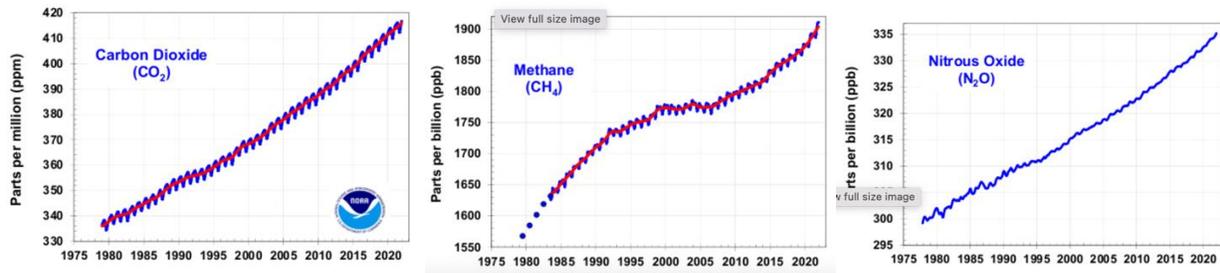
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132 **Figure 1: Carbon Dioxide—Proxy (Indirect) Measurements (From Ice Cores)**

133 **Source:** [NASA, Global Climate Change: Key Indicators](#)

134 The concentration of carbon dioxide is now higher than at any other time in the last 3.6
135 million years.⁹ Unfortunately, not only are current global emissions of carbon dioxide increasing

136 but the rate of emission is also accelerating. The same is true for methane and nitrous oxide
137 emissions, which are also higher than at any time in at least 800,000 years.¹⁰ (Figure 2)
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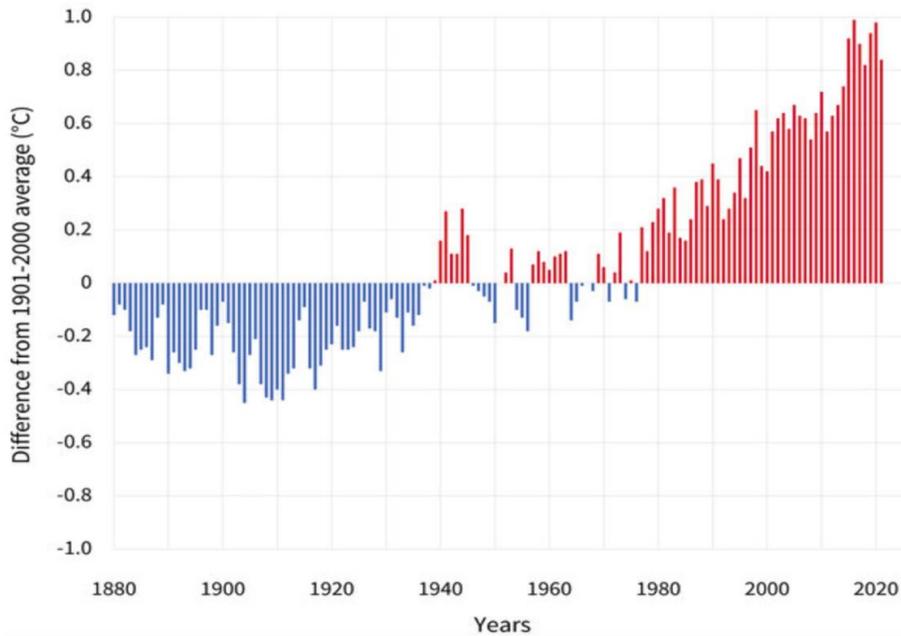


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141 **Figure 2: Global average abundances of the major, well-mixed, long-lived greenhouse**
142 **gases—Carbon Dioxide, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide**

143 **Source: [NOAA's Annual Greenhouse Gas Index](#) (updated spring 2022)**

144 Increasing concentrations of these greenhouse gases, brought on primarily by burning
145 fossil fuels, causes Earth to retain more and more heat from the sun. This energy imbalance has
146 led to an increase in global warming and related climate change. According to the most recent
147 Assessment Report (AR6) issued by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate
148 Change (IPCC), Earth's global surface temperature has increased by around 1.1 degrees Celsius
149 (1.9 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1850.¹¹ (Figure 3) This rate of warming is unprecedented over at
150 least the last 12,000 years. Earth hasn't been this hot since long before human civilization, at
151 least 125,000 years ago.¹² Climate change is a consequence of this global warming.



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152 **Figure 3. Global Average Surface Temperature (1880-2020)**

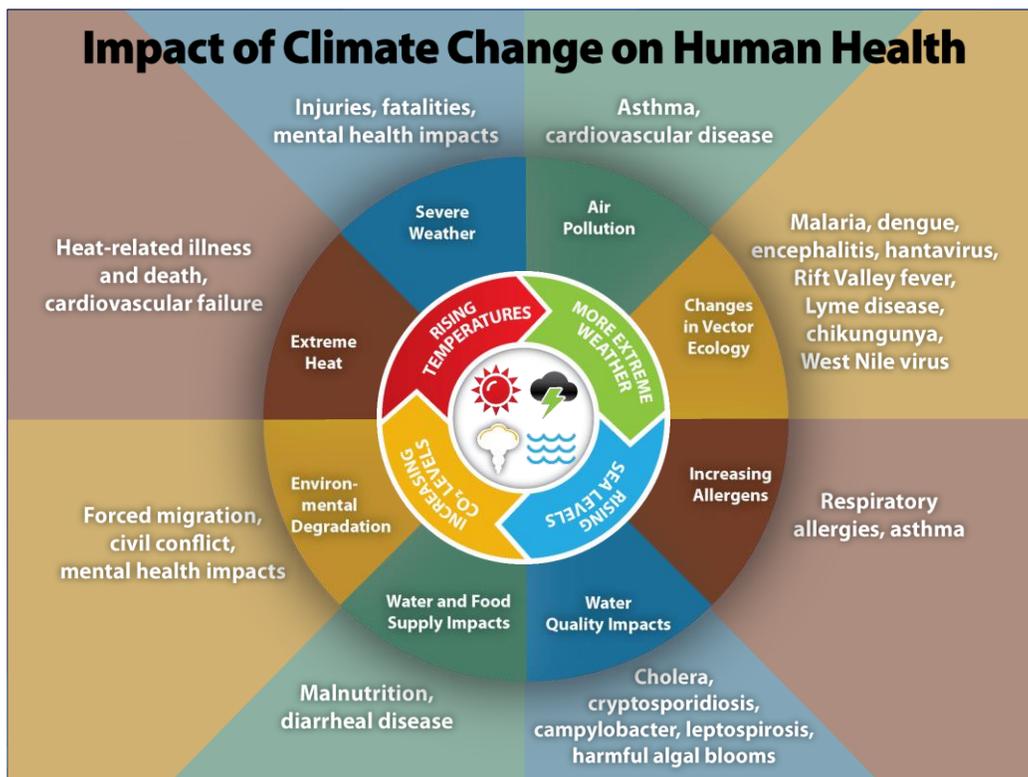
153 **Source: [NOAA, Climate Change: Global Temperature](#) (updated June 2022)**

155 **3. What are the impacts of global warming and climate change?**

156 Alarming evidence of this warming is visible all over the world. As noted above, the
157 global average surface temperature has increased rapidly since 1980 and is currently the
158 warmest in the history of human civilization. This warming is less evident than it could be
159 because the oceans have actually stored over 90% of the excess heat, which has resulted in
160 significant coral bleaching, acidification, and adverse impacts on marine species.

161
162 Ice sheets in the Arctic and on Greenland are melting at an accelerating rate while snow
163 cover is declining in North America. At the same time, glaciers are melting and retreating
164 almost everywhere around the world, jeopardizing drinking water sources for more than one
165 billion of the world’s people. This is just one example of how climate change is endangering
166 human health. (Figure 4)

167



168

169 **Figure 4. Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health**

170 **Source:** [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (updated April 25, 2022)

171

172 This increase of freshwater melting, combined with the expansion of seawater due to
173 warmer temperatures, caused the global sea level to rise 8 inches (20 centimeters) during the
174 20th century. The rate of sea level rise has nearly doubled since the turn of the 21st century,
175 and it is accelerating.¹³ One billion people now occupy land less than 10 meters above the

176 current high tide lines, including 230 million people who live on land that is less than 1 meter
177 above that line.¹⁴

178
179 The warmer temperatures that result from global warming increase the frequency,
180 intensity, and duration of heat waves, which pose grave risks especially for young children,
181 older adults, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised. These public health risks are
182 amplified for those who suffer from the “heat island effect” in cities with few green spaces,
183 those who can’t afford air conditioning, those who work outdoors, or those who experience
184 homelessness. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), excessive heat
185 already causes more deaths each year than any other weather-related disaster.¹⁵ From 1998 to
186 2017 heat waves killed more than 166,000 people worldwide.¹⁶

187
188 The combustion of fossil fuels that produces over two-thirds of global greenhouse gas
189 emissions is also the root cause of dangerous air pollution.¹⁷ According to the *New England*
190 *Journal of Medicine*, an estimated 8.7 million people die each year worldwide due to particulate
191 air pollution caused by incomplete combustion of fossil fuels. This pollution also causes and
192 exacerbates cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness such as asthma, allergic conditions, and
193 mental health disorders.¹⁸

194
195 As for mental health, a growing body of research documents the rise of “climate
196 anxiety.”¹⁹ According to the American Psychiatric Association, more than two-thirds of
197 Americans are somewhat or extremely anxious about the impact of climate change on the
198 planet, and more than half are somewhat or extremely anxious about the impact of climate
199 change on their own mental health.²⁰

200
201 Another impact of climate change is the increased frequency and intensity of such
202 extreme weather events as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires, which result in huge
203 losses of life and property, reduced agricultural yields, and costly disruptions to society. Across
204 the globe, changing ecosystems are affecting many plant and animal species, and scientists
205 warn that additional warming over the next three decades threatens agricultural productivity
206 for some staple food crops.²¹ Not surprisingly, a growing number of people are on the move in
207 pursuit of greater security and welfare.²²

208
209 Most people experience these impacts to some extent, yet those who live on very little,
210 suffer the scourge of racism, or must live on marginalized land experience the impacts of
211 climate change in more significant and debilitating ways. The examples are too numerous to
212 count: subsistence farmers watch their crops fail each year due to persistent drought
213 conditions; women walk further to locate precious water for their families; flood victims with

214 no insurance try to put their lives and homes back together. The rich have options; the poor
215 have burdens.

216

217 Sadly, the impacts of climate change grow only more severe with each passing year.

218

219 **4. Are we facing a critical moment with regard to Earth’s climate?**

220 For decades scientists have warned that the impacts of climate change could become
221 catastrophic for human civilization if global warming exceeds 1.5 degrees Celsius.²³ The IPCC’s
222 Sixth Assessment Report, published in 2021, warns that “global surface temperature will
223 continue to increase until at least mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global
224 warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius and 2 degrees Celsius will be exceeded during the 21st century
225 unless deep reductions in [carbon dioxide] and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the
226 coming decades.”²⁴

227

228 According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), given the current
229 rate of greenhouse gas emissions, the world will experience a global temperature rise of 2.7
230 degrees Celsius by the end of this century.²⁵ Even if all the nations that signed the [United](#)
231 [Nations 2015 Paris Agreement](#) follow through on their commitments, warming is still projected
232 to reach 2.4 degrees Celsius.²⁶ Recall that Earth has warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1850; *we*
233 *face another 1.3 to 1.6 degrees Celsius over the next seven decades*, with warming projected to
234 continue increasing at the end of the 21st century.

235

236 Justifiably alarmed by this information, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres
237 declared the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report a “code red for humanity.” In a statement issued
238 with the report he wrote: “The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable:
239 greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and
240 putting billions of people at immediate risk.”²⁷

241

242 From the standpoint of faith, it is reasonable to conclude that the climate crisis is,
243 indeed, a *kairos* moment.

244

245 The ancient Greeks had two words for “time.” *Chronos* (regular time) referred to the
246 usual sense of time that is ordinary, quantitative, and sequential. *Kairos* (critical time), in
247 contrast, referred to an unusual moment that is extraordinary, qualitative, and decisive. In the
248 New Testament, authors used *kairos* “to emphasize a special moment of time when God visits
249 [God’s] people to offer them a unique opportunity for repentance and conversion, for change
250 and decisive action. It is a time of judgment. It is a moment of truth, a crisis.”²⁸

251

252 In the New Testament, the word *kairos* most often refers to a decisive moment when all
253 were called to repent, believe in the gospel, and follow Jesus. In Christian theology, however,
254 the concept is not confined to this salvific context. In other decisive moments, such as the
255 Reformation period (1517-1580), Christians have used *kairos* to name God’s urgent call for
256 decisive action in history.²⁹

257
258 Some Christians today draw upon *kairos* not only to express the decisive moment of call
259 from God but also to remind believers of the very hope and power found in that call:

260
261 [W]e use the Greek word *kairos* to describe a moment in time, often a brief
262 moment in time, which has eternal significance. ... For the human race as a
263 whole, there is now a *kairos*, a decisive time in our relationship with God’s
264 creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst
265 consequences of human folly, or we will fail to act.³⁰

266

267 **5. How should Christians begin to respond to this *kairos* moment?**

268 As the science related to global warming and climate change has become more
269 definitive and persuasive, many across the globe are raising increasingly anguished cries.
270 Almost all people have been affected in one way or another by a natural disaster that has
271 jeopardized us or those we love.

272

273 Many of us in the ELCA contribute to and/or volunteer for organizations, such as
274 Lutheran Disaster Response and the Red Cross, that have diligently responded to the
275 devastation caused by wildfires in the West, tornadoes in the Midwest and Southeast, and
276 flooding throughout the country, caused by severe storms and hurricanes.

277

278 It is frightening and disheartening to learn that growing numbers of farm workers and
279 livestock are dying from heat stress in the United States and around the world.³¹ Some of us
280 work outdoors or know others who do, and we all rely on farmers who plant, cultivate, and
281 harvest the food we take for granted. Some of us live in states along the southern U.S. border
282 where rapidly growing numbers of desperate people seek safety and opportunity in our country
283 as they flee violence and increasing ecological devastation in their countries of origin.

284

285 In addition, some who need the income from fossil fuel extraction, or who work for
286 companies that extract that fuel to power our economy, feel vilified or disregarded. They often
287 feel this most strongly from those who argue urgently for a transition to clean renewable
288 energy and rapid decreases in greenhouse gas emissions.

289

290 Others who live next to oil refineries, coal-fired power plants, natural gas production
291 and distribution facilities, plastic manufacturers, and freeways feel disregarded, disrespected,
292 and ignored, even as they breathe in noxious emissions from these facilities. All around us are
293 voices crying out for help and change.

294

295 The disruption of creation and these diverse voices make clear that human beings have
296 failed to live out their vocation to be good and caring “keepers” of creation. Living in right
297 relationship with God and creation begins with confession and repentance.

298

299 As God’s people we are called to confess:

300

- Our failure to consider the interests of future generations.

301

- Our disregard for the victims of environmental injustice.

302

- Our insufficient concern for the welfare of other species facing extinction.

303

- Our personal complicity through high-carbon lifestyles.

304

- Our dismissive disdain for those with whom we disagree.

305

306 The ELCA teaches that, though sin has personal dimensions, “sin is ... also collective or
307 communal. Sinful humans create structures, organizations, and societies that perpetuate sin,
308 sometimes unintentionally. This is called ‘structural sin.’”³² Colonialism and industrialization are
309 two structural factors responsible in large measure for the social and ecological woes we face
310 today.

310

311 Some of us have benefited from these structural forces at the expense of others who
312 live with the consequences in degraded landscapes and polluted conditions. “In our liturgy, we
313 name this systemic reality in the confession: ‘We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.’
314 Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we can identify it as sin,
315 confess it, and, through the grace and strength of God, begin to act differently.”³³

316

317 **6. What insights from ELCA social teaching are helpful?**

318

319 **Law, Gospel, and the Role of Government.** Though we are justified by grace through
320 faith on account of Christ, we remain subject to the forces of sin. We are, at one and the same
321 time, saints and sinners. Given this complicated yet realistic view of human nature, our
322 Lutheran tradition says God is active in the world in two ways—through the law and the gospel.

322

323 As Creator of the world, God uses civil authorities to restrain evil, establish justice, and
324 promote the common good through rule of law and use of reason. As Redeemer of the world,
325 God works through the church to proclaim the gospel, serve the needy, and promote mercy
326 and reconciliation through proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments.

327

328 Given the systemic nature of the climate crisis, government and public policy are both
329 key. Lutherans believe “government remains God’s gift because it is intended to do what
330 churches, families, individuals, and businesses cannot do on their own: protect and coordinate
331 the well-being of individuals, communities, and creation.”³⁴ The litmus test for government
332 action is whether our neighbor is being served and whether justice is being done.

333
334 **Three Dimensions of Climate Justice.** What constitutes justice is not always self-evident,
335 however. Figuring out what constitutes justice in the context of climate change is even more
336 complicated because it involves at least three interlocking dimensions.

337
338 First is the question of *intragenerational* justice. That is, how should society distribute
339 fairly among present generations the burdens associated with greenhouse gas mitigation and
340 the costs of adaptation? Second is the question of *intergenerational* justice. That is, how can we
341 best respect and defend the interests of future generations of our and other species and the
342 integrity of the ecological systems upon which life depends? Finally, there is the matter of
343 *intersectional* justice. That is, how does climate justice intersect with historical injustices related
344 to race, class, and gender?

345
346 **Four Moral Principles.** The 1993 ELCA social statement *Caring for Creation* identifies
347 four moral principles to help us discern what justice requires in these three dimensions:
348 participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability. These four principles, used across
349 several ELCA social statements, are directly relevant to ethical assessments of international and
350 national climate policy proposals.

351
352 For example, the principle of *participation* stresses that all forms of life are important
353 and that their interests must be heard and respected in decisions that affect their lives. At a
354 minimum this means “our church may be a place where differing groups can be brought
355 together, tough issues considered, and a common good pursued.”³⁵

356
357 The principle of *solidarity* highlights the kinship and interdependence of all forms of life
358 and encourages support and assistance for those who suffer. *Caring for Creation* emphasizes
359 that “this church will ... be in solidarity with industry, agriculture, or the home. We will insist on
360 an equitable sharing of the costs of maintaining a healthy environment.”³⁶

361
362 The principle of *sufficiency* emphasizes that all creation is entitled to share in the goods
363 of creation. This means, most fundamentally, that all forms of life are entitled to those things
364 that satisfy their basic needs and contribute to their fulfillment. Insofar as the norm of

365 sufficiency emphasizes fairness and repudiates wasteful and harmful consumption, it
366 represents one dimension of distributive justice.

367
368 Finally, the principle of *sustainability* values “the capacity of natural and social systems
369 to survive and thrive together over the long term.”³⁷ Widespread poverty plaguing present
370 generations is not just or sustainable; in addition, we must recognize that sustainability
371 obviously requires “a larger scope of accountability to future generations.”³⁸

372
373 **Prioritize the Poor and Vulnerable.** A moral commitment implied by these four
374 principles and thoroughly grounded in ELCA social teaching is *the ethical priority for the most*
375 *vulnerable and marginalized*. For example:

376
377 God stands in judgment of those in authority who fall short of their
378 responsibility, and is moved with compassion to deliver the impoverished from
379 all that oppresses them: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the
380 right of the lowly and the destitute” (Psalm 82:3). The rich are expected to use
381 wealth to benefit their neighbors who live in poverty here and throughout the
382 world.³⁹

383
384 Our neighbors include “all people and creation throughout the world.”⁴⁰ Christians have a
385 prophetic obligation “to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate
386 in hope with poor and powerless people.”⁴¹ One of the greatest injustices wreaked by climate
387 change is that those who have done the least to produce it bear its greatest consequences.

388
389 **The Precautionary Principle.** Finally, ELCA social teaching brings to bear on the climate
390 crisis what has come to be called “*the precautionary principle*”: “When human activities may
391 lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, action shall be
392 taken to avoid or diminish that harm.”⁴² This is a sound basis for heeding the warnings of
393 scientists and reducing emissions through public policy and international cooperation, as well
394 as through personal and corporate responsibility.

395 396 **7. How does the ELCA teach that climate change should be addressed?**

397 From these ethical insights emerge the following convictions regarding the challenges
398 posed by global warming and climate change.

399
400 We should acknowledge that some in our church don’t think the church or people of
401 faith should get involved in politics. “Taking partisan stances is not the church’s role, but
402 ‘politics’ has to do with negotiating how the benefits and burdens of living in a society are

403 shared.”⁴³ In a democracy, Christians share political responsibility. The ELCA encourages
404 Christians to participate in the affairs of government.

405
406 The principle of participation authorizes this church’s advocacy—speaking alongside
407 and for those who are marginalized. This happens when “members speak out individually or as
408 part of activist groups. It also includes the public witness coordinated by the advocacy offices of
409 the ELCA or of Lutheran partner nongovernmental organizations.”⁴⁴ Members of our church
410 have a moral obligation to be engaged in setting the direction of our country as we live out our
411 vocation to care for God’s creation.

412
413 We must be guided by courage and humility as we pursue these faithful endeavors. On
414 the one hand, we need to summon the courage to face the climate crisis and the perils it poses
415 to human civilization as well the diversity of life on Earth. On the other hand, we need to
416 exercise humility regarding how best to address these perils.

417
418 We can agree on ends but disagree on means. Well-intentioned people can disagree
419 about what constitutes the better part of ethical wisdom. We must deliberate and collaborate
420 together because we cannot solve the problem individually or as a single institution. Moral
421 deliberation and action together are essential to our identity as a church.

422
423 Guided by these insights, this church puts forward the following convictions to guide
424 discernment and actions toward the challenges posed by the climate *kairos*:

425
426 A. The ELCA calls upon individuals, agencies, organizations, corporations, and governments
427 *to pursue goals, set policies, or establish practices that:*

- 428 ● Affirm the overwhelming scientific evidence that the current rise in emissions
429 and related global warming has been caused by human activity.
- 430 ● Invite and engage all stakeholders to develop climate change solutions that are
431 appropriate to their locale and adequate to the challenges we face.
- 432 ● Prioritize allocation of resources to those who bear the least responsibility for
433 greenhouse gas emissions but already experience disproportionately its costly
434 impacts.
- 435 ○ Foster restorative justice by fully funding the United Nations [Green](#)
436 [Climate Fund](#) and significant funds for U.S. victims of environmental
437 injustice within “frontline communities.”
- 438 ● Reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the rate scientists project will keep global
439 warming below 2.0 degrees Celsius and as close as possible to 1.5 degrees
440 Celsius.

- 441 ○ Include an interim U.S. target of 50% reduction of greenhouse gas
- 442 emissions from 2005 levels by 2030.
- 443 ○ Affirm differing but increasingly ambitious reduction targets for
- 444 signatories of the Paris Agreement.
- 445 ● Support mitigation strategies that will achieve this goal, including:
- 446 ○ Increased regulation of the sources of greenhouse gas emissions.
- 447 ○ Increased incentives for energy efficiency, renewable energy systems,
- 448 building electrification, and electrification of transportation.
- 449 ○ New and expanded state and federal clean-energy standards.
- 450 ○ Carbon-pricing approaches that successfully mitigate regressive impacts
- 451 on low- and moderate-income households while also effectively reducing
- 452 emissions.
- 453 ○ Improved forest management practices that reduce deforestation and
- 454 promote biodiversity through afforestation (tree planting) in urban,
- 455 suburban, and rural areas.
- 456 ○ Increased incentives for long-lasting soil carbon sequestration and other
- 457 regenerative practices on farms and ranches, such as silvopasture,⁴⁵
- 458 managed grazing, perennial staple crops, tree intercropping, regenerative
- 459 annual cropping, conservation agriculture, and abandoned farmland
- 460 restoration.⁴⁶
- 461 ○ Dietary and other lifestyle changes that result in fewer greenhouse gas
- 462 emissions, such as eliminating food waste, composting, adopting plant-
- 463 rich diets, building and utilizing bicycle infrastructure, carpooling, and
- 464 promoting walkable communities.⁴⁷
- 465 ● Support strategies that enable adaptation to climate change, including:
- 466 ○ Protection of coastal wetlands.
- 467 ○ Sustainable agroforestry.
- 468 ○ Decentralized renewable energy ownership, production, and distribution.
- 469 ○ Securing and protecting the land rights of Indigenous peoples.
- 470 ○ Increased and improved public transit.⁴⁸

471

472 B. Likewise, this church *rejects beliefs, goals, and policies that:*

- 473 ● Dismiss the fact that the world's industrialized nations are responsible for the
- 474 vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions since the dawn of the Industrial Era,
- 475 or that current per capita emissions in the United States are three times higher
- 476 than the global average.⁴⁹
- 477 ● Perpetuate the disproportionate burden borne by those whose communities
- 478 host industries that produce harmful pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

- 479 ● Adopt a self-serving, defeatist attitude that perpetuates the unjust status quo
480 and avoids moral responsibility for climate change.
481 ● Prioritize economic impacts on present generations without considering social,
482 economic, or ecological consequences for future generations.
483
- 484 C. In addition, the ELCA will *raise searching questions about goals and policies that*:
485 ● Result in toxic wastes posing grave dangers to present and future generations.
486 ● Rely exclusively on technological solutions to reduce emissions and/or to address
487 Earth’s energy imbalance.⁵⁰
488 ● Refuse to consider how climate change imperils financial investments or how
489 investments in fossil fuel companies perpetuate and exacerbate climate change.
490
- 491 D. Finally, the ELCA *challenges all expressions of this church to*:
492 ● Promote creation care through preaching and through worship and educational
493 resources.⁵¹
494 ● Provide pastoral care to those struggling with “climate anxiety” and other
495 related mental health concerns, especially our youngest people.
496 ● Witness publicly to the climate crisis and “walk the talk” by:
497 ○ Achieving the same levels of greenhouse gas reduction that we urge the
498 U.S. government to pursue.
499 ○ Investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy systems.
500 ○ Reviewing how ELCA landholdings can be used to sequester carbon,
501 promote biodiversity, and/or encourage other life-giving relationships
502 with creation.
503 ○ Becoming “anticipatory communities” that model climate resiliency (e.g.,
504 emergency shelters, cooling spaces, community gardens).
505 ● Demonstrate our care for creation via our budgeting and investment of church
506 funds—including screening fossil fuel stocks or engaging in shareholder activism
507 regarding such funds.
508 ● Promote scientific literacy and instruction about global warming and climate
509 change in all our educational institutions.
510 ● Engage in legislative advocacy at all levels of government.
511 ● Join with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners working to address the
512 climate crisis.⁵²
513

514 **Conclusion: Where do we find hope and power for facing climate change?**

515 The climate crisis is a *kairos* moment. Just as Martin Luther’s career reflected “a
516 dynamic of protest and reform matched to a keen sense of *kairos*,” so too are Christians called

517 to face the climate crisis in a similar way today.⁵³ As members of this society, we would do well
518 to heed the insight of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose words about confronting racism in his
519 time resonate for us as we confront the climate crisis today:

520

521 We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum
522 of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still
523 the thief of time.... Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous
524 civilizations are written the pathetic words: "Too late."⁵⁴

525

526 We should view the present reality and the future we are moving into with honest fear,
527 yet an alternative vision of flourishing and abundance is essential to our response as a church.
528 Our recent social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice* summarizes this vision well:

529

530 We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God's intention
531 revealed through the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and
532 flourish. From creation to redemption in the Christian story, the Scriptures
533 reveal God's intention of abundant and flourishing life for creation, including for
534 human beings. The Book of Revelation speaks of the healing of the nations and
535 closes with a vision of new heavens and earth as the ultimate outcome of God's
536 resolve (Revelation 22:1-2). This church believes the triune God intends creation
537 to flourish and is ever at work so that all people may thrive.⁵⁵

538

539 Our planet has a fever. God yearns for earth's ecological well-being. "God's faithfulness
540 alone sustains the Church and renews our faith, hope, and love."⁵⁶ As God's people we address
541 the climate crisis with active hope rather than paralyzing despair. "Captured by hope, we
542 proclaim that God has made peace with all things through the blood of the cross (Colossians
543 1:15-20), and that the Spirit of God, 'the giver of life,' renews the face of the earth."⁵⁷

544

545 May that Spirit renew this church's sense of emergency and empower us to faithful and
546 fervent action in this *kairos* moment.

547

548 **(Note: a glossary will be created for the message if adopted)**

Endnotes

¹ Biblical references throughout this social message are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

² ELCA social statement [*Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*](#) (1993): 11.

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- ³ See [“Caring for Creation: Climate Change,”](#) issue paper for ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility, approved by the ELCA Church Council, November 2021 [CC21.11.25].
- ⁴ Quirin Schiermeier et al., [“Energy Alternatives: Electricity Without Carbon,”](#) *Nature* 454 (2008): 816-23.
- ⁵ ELCA social statement [Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility](#) (2003): 10.
- ⁶ ELCA, [“A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian and Alaska Native People”](#) (2021).
- ⁷ [Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#) (1993): 3.
- ⁸ [“Global Warming,”](#) NASA Earth Observatory, June 3, 2010.
- ⁹ [“Despite Pandemic Shutdowns, Carbon Dioxide and Methane Surged in 2020,”](#) NOAA Research News, April 7, 2021.
- ¹⁰ [“The NOAA Annual Greenhouse Gas Index,”](#) Global Monitoring Laboratory, updated spring 2022. See also Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Summary for Policymakers” in [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 8, A.2.1.
- ¹¹ Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Summary for Policymakers,” *ibid.*: 5, A.1.2.
- ¹² For changes in global surface temperature, reconstructed from paleoclimate archives, see Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Summary for Policymakers,” *ibid.*: 6, panel (a).
- ¹³ [“How Do We Know Climate Change Is Real?,”](#) NASA Global Climate Change.
- ¹⁴ Scott A. Kulp and Benjamin H. Strauss, [“New Elevation Data Triple Estimates of Global Vulnerability to Sea-level Rise and Coastal Flooding,”](#) *Nature Communications* 10, article 4844 (2019).
- ¹⁵ [“Climate Change Indicators: Heat-related Deaths,”](#) United States Environmental Protection Agency, updated April 2021.
- ¹⁶ [“Heatwaves,”](#) World Health Organization.
- ¹⁷ [“Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data,”](#) United States Environmental Protection Agency, updated Feb. 25, 2022.
- ¹⁸ See Caren G. Solomon et al., [“Fossil-fuel Pollution and Climate Change — A New NEJM Group Series,”](#) *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 16, 2022.
- ¹⁹ Sarah E.O. Schwartz et al., [“Climate Change Anxiety and Mental Health: Environmental Activism as Buffer,”](#) *Current Psychology*, Feb. 28, 2022.
- ²⁰ [“New APA Poll Reveals That Americans Are Increasingly Anxious About Climate Change’s Impact on Planet, Mental Health,”](#) American Psychiatric Association, Oct. 21, 2020.
- ²¹ [“Global Climate Change Impact on Crops Expected Within 10 Years, NASA Study Finds,”](#) NASA Global Climate Change, Nov. 2, 2021. See also Chengzheng Yu, Ruiqing Miao, and Madhu Khanna, [“Maladaptation of U.S. Corn and Soybeans to a Changing Climate,”](#) *Science Reports*, Rep 11, 12351 (2021), and Jeff Mulhollem, [“Warming Climate to Result in Reduced Corn Production; Irrigation Blunts Effect,”](#) *Penn State Research News*, Feb. 21, 2022.
- ²² [“Impacts of Climate Change,”](#) United States Environmental Protection Agency. Noting these trends, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has flagged the growth of “climate refugees” and Lutheran Disaster Response is refocusing its work on the need to foster community resilience in the face of climate change.

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- ²³ Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Summary for Policymakers” in [Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C](#), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018.
- ²⁴ Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Summary for Policymakers” in [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 14, B.1.
- ²⁵ “[Emissions Gap Report 2021](#),” U.N. Environment Programme, Oct. 26, 2021.
- ²⁶ “[Global Temperatures: Evaluating Progress Toward the Paris Agreement](#),” Climate Action Tracker, updated Nov. 9, 2021.
- ²⁷ “[Guterres: The IPCC Report Is a Code Red for Humanity](#),” United Nations, Aug. 9, 2021.
- ²⁸ Robert McAfee Brown, ed., *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Crisis in South Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. (Skotaville Publishers and Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987): 2. Cited in Robert McAfee Brown, ed., *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1990): 26. See also Barbara Rossing and Johan Buitendag, “[Life in Its Fullness: Ecology, Eschatology and Ecodomy in a Time of Climate Change](#),” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, vol. 76, no. 1. (2020).
- ²⁹ See Daniel Weidner, “[Prophetic Criticism and the Rhetoric of Temporality: Paul Tillich’s Kairos Texts and Weimar Intellectual Politics](#),” *Political Theology* 21:1-2 (2020): 71-88.
- ³⁰ Bartholomew I of Constantinople, “[Symposium Arctic: The Mirror of Life](#),” Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration, Sept. 12, 2007.
- ³¹ “[Heat Stress Prevention](#),” Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, farmworkers die from heat-related illness at a rate 20 times greater than that of the entire U.S. civilian workforce. See also Bill Chappell, “[Days of Intense Heat Have Killed Thousands of Cattle in Kansas](#),” NPR/Wisconsin Public Radio, June 16, 2022.
- ³² ELCA Social Statement [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#) (2019): 38.
- ³³ [Ibid.](#)
- ³⁴ ELCA Social Message “[Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#),” (2020): 2.
- ³⁵ [Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#) (1993): 6.
- ³⁶ [Ibid.](#): 11-12. The principle of solidarity supports intragenerational transfers of resources from the rich to the poor so that they can adapt to climate change both now and in the future, but it also calls present generations to make sacrifices for future generations as a matter of intergenerational ethical responsibility. See ELCA social statement [Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All](#) (1999): 15.
- ³⁷ [Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All](#) (1999): 14.
- ³⁸ ELCA Social Statement [Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility](#) (2003): 22. The principle precludes shortsighted emphases on economic growth that fundamentally harms Earth’s climate now and in the future, but it also excludes any approaches to climate policy that do not address the fact that three billion people in the world currently lack access to modern energy sources for cooking and heating their homes. See Max Roser, “[Energy Poverty and Indoor Air Pollution: A Problem as Old as Humanity That We Can End Within Our Lifetime](#),” Our World in Data, July 5, 2021.
- ³⁹ ELCA Social Statement [Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All](#) (1999): 6.

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- ⁴⁰ [Ibid.](#): 4.
- ⁴¹ ELCA Social Statement [Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective](#) (1991): 3.
- ⁴² [Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility](#) (2003): 27, footnote 41.
- ⁴³ [“Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy”](#) (2020): 2.
- ⁴⁴ [Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility](#) (2003): 25.
- ⁴⁵ Silvopasture integrates trees, pasture, and forage into a single system. Incorporating trees into agriculture improves land health and increases carbon sequestration. See [“Silvopasture,”](#) Project Drawdown.
- ⁴⁶ [“Table of Solutions,”](#) Project Drawdown.
- ⁴⁷ [Ibid.](#)
- ⁴⁸ Isabella Suarez, [“5 Strategies That Achieve Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Simultaneously,”](#) World Resources Institute, Feb. 10, 2020.
- ⁴⁹ See [“CO2 Emissions,”](#) [“Per Capita CO₂ Emissions,”](#) and [“Cumulative CO₂ Emissions,”](#) Our World in Data.
- ⁵⁰ [Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#) (1993): 12. See also ELCA social statement [Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility](#) (2003): 18.
- ⁵¹ For example: [ELCA Caring for Creation Today](#), [ELCA Creation Care Ambassador Program](#), and [Lutherans Restoring Creation](#).
- ⁵² For example, [Creation Care Collective](#), [Interfaith Power & Light](#), [GreenFaith](#), and [Citizens’ Climate Lobby](#) (CCL Lutheran Action Team).
- ⁵³ Larry Rasmussen, [“Waiting for the Lutherans,”](#) *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37:2 (April 2010): 86.
- ⁵⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., “A Time to Break Silence,” in James Melvin Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991): 243.
- ⁵⁵ [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#) (2019): 2, 14-15.
- ⁵⁶ [Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective](#) (1991): 8.
- ⁵⁷ [Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#) (1993): 5.