

Frequently Asked Questions about “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action”

What’s the most important thing to know about the proposed social statement “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action”?

The statement contains two versions. The short statement consists of 40 articles plus a comprehensive list of convictions and commitments. The full statement includes those same 40 articles with explanations of each, as well as a preface and conclusion, to more thoroughly explore the deeper meaning of the text. These two formats serve different needs, yet both were crafted in hope that the Holy Spirit will move readers into fruitful understanding, commitment, and action.

The document expresses several deep Christian themes. Grounded in God’s intention of abundant life for all, it confesses patriarchy and sexism as sins. It names the resources of the Lutheran faith to address these sins and identifies what needs to be done both in the church and in society.

The social statement is a “call to action” because it urges members to recognize patriarchy and sexism as sinful and to seek systemic changes that foster abundant, flourishing life for all people within both church and society.

What is a social statement?

ELCA social statements are teaching documents that express the understanding of this church and assist members in forming judgments on social issues. Social statements do not bind the consciences of church members; rather, they are meant to aid in communal and individual moral deliberation and moral formation. Social statements also provide the framework for the ELCA’s social teaching, govern its policy, and guide its advocacy and work as a public church.

How are social statements used?

Social statements state the understanding of this church and govern its policy. They provide the framework for social teaching and ELCA members are encouraged to use them for guidance and discernment, but they do not bind the conscience of church members.

Why is this only the “proposed” social statement?

At this point in the process, the document has no official status as ELCA teaching. To earn that status, it must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the Churchwide Assembly.

Why is the ELCA studying sexism and gender justice?

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly authorized development of a social statement on these topics because several synods requested it. In accordance with ELCA processes, a task force was created to study the issues, provide resource material, create a draft, and offer a proposed social statement to be considered by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

In addition, “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action” serves as the ELCA’s response to the Lutheran World Federation’s “Gender Justice Policy,” which calls on all 148 of its member churches to foster gender justice. For more information about this initiative, visit www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-gender-justice-policy.

How has the content of this document been determined?

The content and range of issues covered in “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action” were developed through the ELCA social statement process. Members of the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ read, deliberated, and consulted with experts on matters ranging from the Bible to gender theory to sociology and theology. In 2016 the task force published the study “Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement” to invite deliberation and response throughout the ELCA. Responses to that study were tabulated and reported to the task force.

Drawing on this research and feedback, the task force drafted the statement, which received additional feedback from across the church during an open comment period. The task force then reconvened to edit the document, which is now the proposed “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action.”

The proposed statement represents the task force’s best thinking to date about issues of sexism, patriarchy, and gender justice in both church and society. The task force concluded its work on the behalf of the ELCA by unanimously supporting the proposed statement, which was forwarded to the ELCA Conference of Bishops and the Church Council.

What are the “Implementing Resolutions”?

“Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action” includes 17 implementing resolutions, a set of tasks that the ELCA resolves to complete following their approval by the Churchwide Assembly. Though not an exhaustive list of what the church seeks to accomplish, the resolutions represent a first step in addressing sexism and gender justice within the ministries and congregations of the ELCA.

What happens next?

Now that the proposed statement has been unanimously approved by the task force and reviewed by the ELCA Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, it will go to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly in August for consideration. For more information about this process, see our timeline of the social statement at www.ELCA.org/womenandjustice.