

1 A social statement...

## 2 **Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action**

3 This social statement comes in two versions. The short version conveys the statement's essence in  
4 40 articles, containing the entire scope of convictions and commitments.<sup>1</sup> The full statement consists of  
5 those same 40 articles but with a preface, conclusion, and an explanation for each, allowing readers to go  
6 deeper into an article's meaning. These two formats serve different needs, yet both were crafted in the  
7 hope that the Holy Spirit will move readers into fruitful understanding, commitment, and action.

8 Several supplemental resources are available to aid readers with this statement, including a user's  
9 guide that provides an index, contemporary examples, and additional reference material. All supplemental  
10 resources are available on the statement's web page, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).

11 This document concludes with a glossary for select terms. When any such term first appears in  
12 the short or full statement, it is noted with **boldface** type.

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14

### *Table of Contents*

15

16

#### **Short Statement**

17

Articles 1-40, page 2

18

19

#### **Full Statement**

20

*Preface* A Shared Vision: We trust God's promises, and we hope for justice., page 9

21

*Section I* Fundamental Teaching: God desires abundant life for all.

22

Articles 1-8, page 10

23

*Section II* Analysis of the Problem: Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.

24

Articles 9-15, page 17

25

*Section III* The Christian Tradition: It is both challenge and resource.

26

Articles 16-22, page 24

27

*Section IV* Response: The ELCA is called to new commitments and action as a church.

28

Articles 23-30, page 31

29

*Section V* Response: The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society.

30

Articles 31-40, page 36

31

*Conclusion* A Shared Challenge: Living in hope, we are called to action., page 42

32

33

#### **Reference Material**

34

*Glossary*, page 42

35

36

#### **Implementing Resolutions**

37

*Resolutions 1-17*, page 47 [Note: Resolutions are voted on independently.]

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<sup>1</sup> The short statement, with preface, conclusion, and glossary, is also available separately, both online and in print. Visit [www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements).

# Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action

## Short Statement

### I. Fundamental Teaching: God desires abundant life for all.

- 1) We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God’s intention revealed through the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and flourish.
- 2) We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation flourish. Being in the image of the triune God means that we humans are relational, that we are interconnected. Just as we interact with God, we are social creatures relating with each other and all of creation.
- 3) Despite God’s intention for creation, humans exist in a state of sin. Because we fail to trust God as we should, we are alienated from God, from other people, and from creation itself. Not only individually, but also collectively, we live out this alienation through disobedience to God, pride, complacency, self-abasement, and acts against others, all of which limit the abundant life God intends.
- 4) We believe that we are healed and redeemed from this alienation. That is, Lutherans confess that we are justified by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what we have done or left undone. This promise means we are freed from bondage to the people and things we trust and love more than God or the ways we try to justify ourselves, sometimes at the expense of others. God’s grace frees us and empowers us to love others as God loves all of creation.
- 5) As Lutheran Christians, our focus on Jesus Christ affects how this church understands **justice**. Because we are freed in Christ for others, we are able to respond to God’s call to love our neighbor as ourselves. In society, neighbor love takes the form of **neighbor justice**.
- 6) This focus on Jesus Christ also affects how we understand the Scriptures. While the Scriptures speak both Law and Gospel, Martin Luther emphasized that the Scriptures should be read by paying attention to what proclaims Christ—what carries the Gospel message of God’s grace and mercy to all people.
- 7) As Lutheran Christians, we recognize human reason and knowledge as gifts from God to be used for the common good. While the scriptural call to neighbor justice is clear, human reason and knowledge are essential to discern the specific forms, policies, and structures that best enable us to enact justice in particular contexts. Recognizing that the gifts of reason and knowledge are given to people of all religions and worldviews, Christians are freed to work together with them for the common good.

82 8) We believe that the Church is called to live as the body of Christ in the world even while  
83 we struggle with the realities of sin. As Lutherans, we recognize that acting justly within family,  
84 church, and society for the common good is central to the vocation to which God calls all people.

85  
86 **II. Analysis of the Problem:**  
87 **Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.**  
88

89 9) Though God desires fullness of life and **equity** for everyone, as a church we recognize  
90 that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to **sex** (biological),  
91 **gender**, or both. In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are  
92 shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin,  
93 nationality, immigration status, **sexuality**, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied  
94 experiences, and education. This reality is known as **intersectionality**.<sup>2</sup> This statement’s  
95 references to women and girls are intended to be inclusive of all people who identify as women  
96 or girls in the diversity of their individual and communal identities and expressions.

97  
98 10) The experiences of women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, both in the past and  
99 in the present moment, reveal that they have often been restricted in realizing abundant life on  
100 the basis of sex (biological) or gender.

101  
102 11) The far-reaching harm experienced by women and girls is rooted in a pattern of power,  
103 **privilege**, and prejudice, the key elements in any social system of oppression. This is the basis of  
104 the ELCA’s understanding of racism.<sup>3</sup> When power, privilege, and prejudice are associated with  
105 sex, gender, and sexuality, sociologists use the terms **patriarchy** and **sexism**.<sup>4</sup>

106 Patriarchy is a social system dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on  
107 men’s actions, voices, and authority. Patriarchy does not mean that males are bad, and females  
108 are good, or that only males support this unfair system. However, in patriarchal systems, men are  
109 typically viewed as superior to women, are given more power than women, and have more  
110 authority than women. A patriarchal worldview and way of life grants male privilege. Sexism is  
111 the reinforcement of male privilege, which leads to discrimination. It promotes the silencing,  
112 controlling, and devaluing of women, girls, and people whose gender expression is different  
113 from the conventional expressions of masculinity and femininity.

114 Because people live within social and religious systems, everyone knowingly or  
115 unknowingly participates in this patriarchal system. Although patriarchy and sexism affect  
116 different people in different ways, as individuals we are socialized to conform to these patterns  
117 of power, privilege, and prejudice. This makes us complicit in maintaining social systems of  
118 oppression.

119  

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<sup>2</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167.

<sup>3</sup> *Freed in Christ: Race Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995): 4, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).

<sup>4</sup> See Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Past*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University Press, 2014).

120 12) Although men and boys often benefit from this social system, patriarchal structures and  
121 values also harm men and boys, including gay and **transgender** men. They are harmed when  
122 they are pressured to conform to narrow gender stereotypes or are unable to live out a false ideal  
123 of male superiority and control. People of all genders who do not conform to gender-based roles  
124 and stereotypes often are not seen or valued; sometimes they are violently oppressed and even  
125 killed. Men of all racial and ethnic minorities in North America may experience patriarchy and  
126 sexism particularly intertwined with white privilege. The message of white-identified patriarchy  
127 and sexism is that men and boys of color are not fully men and boys.

128  
129 13) Some social and religious beliefs compound patriarchy. Most instances of gender-based  
130 harm are connected to commonly held beliefs and customs. For example, ideas that people are  
131 created into a **hierarchy** based on sex—being only male or female—reinforce and sometimes  
132 lead to gender-based injustice.

133  
134 14) The ELCA celebrates that humans are relational beings and that we live in social  
135 systems. Positive, equitable social systems can lead to joy and gladness. However, social systems  
136 can also have negative consequences.

137 Even though individuals make choices within social systems, those systems are more  
138 powerful than any individual, government, culture, or religious community. Beliefs and customs  
139 are reflected in laws, policies, and practices within both secular and religious institutions, which  
140 makes them so systemic that they are difficult to identify and dismantle.

141 This church's commitment to neighbor justice compels us to expose how patriarchy and  
142 sexism are woven into individual, social, and religious life, causing harm to all people and even  
143 to all of creation.

144  
145 15) As Christians, we see that patriarchy and sexism prevent all human beings from living  
146 into the abundant life for which God created them. Patriarchy and sexism reflect a lack of trust in  
147 God and result in harm and broken relationships. Just as this church has identified racism as sin,  
148 this church identifies patriarchy and sexism as sin. We confess that, as God's people forgiven in  
149 Jesus Christ, we are simultaneously liberated and sinful. We are broken, yet we are made new by  
150 grace through faith. This good news is true even as we participate in cultures and societies that  
151 are broadly patriarchal and sexist.

152

### 153 **III. The Christian Tradition:** 154 **It is both challenge and resource.**

155  
156 16) In faith, this church confesses that Christianity has been complicit in the sin of patriarchy  
157 and sexism through certain beliefs, practices, and aspects of its history. At the same time, we  
158 believe God provides resources within the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition to challenge  
159 the harmful beliefs and effects of patriarchy and sexism and to bring forth new ways of living.

160  
161 17) The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures.  
162 We also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in the  
163 Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism. Some aspects  
164 of the Scriptures reflect the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse

165 contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm. A Lutheran reading of  
166 the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological  
167 aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally.  
168

169 18) The Christian theological tradition is full of ideas and teaching that can negatively or  
170 positively affect people. In particular, some doctrines affect our understanding of humanity and  
171 God more than others. Teachings about the cross and suffering, the image of God, the  
172 incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity have sometimes been misused to support  
173 patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, church practices, behaviors, and structures. These teachings affect  
174 our use of language and our understandings of humanity and Christian ministry. At the same  
175 time, these doctrines can be liberating resources for healing the effects of the sins of patriarchy  
176 and sexism.  
177

178 19) The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith empowers this  
179 church to challenge patriarchy and sexism, which devalue people according to sinful human  
180 standards.  
181

182 20) The Lutheran understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, in  
183 which the Word of God is connected with tangible, physical elements, grounds efforts to prevent  
184 the harm that sexism and patriarchy cause to the bodies, minds, and spirits of human beings.  
185

186 21) The ELCA has identified sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation as the  
187 key principles for creating and supporting justice.<sup>5</sup> This church commends these principles to  
188 create and support neighbor justice, specifically **gender justice** for the neighbor. Social and  
189 religious structures and institutions—including ideas, beliefs, religious teachings, laws, policies,  
190 practices, and language—must be assessed and should be guided by these principles.  
191

192 22) The ELCA recognizes that some progress has been made to address patriarchy and  
193 sexism and to reduce their effects; however, more effort is required. We believe that this church,  
194 together with many other partners, can identify and challenge the complexities of patriarchy and  
195 sexism and advance equity. Gender-based equity happens through beliefs and ideas that are  
196 gender just and through laws, policies, and practices that support an equitable common good—  
197 abundant life for all.  
198

#### 199 **IV. Response:**

### 200 **The ELCA is called to new commitments and action as a church.**

201  
202 23) Propelled by these theological convictions and the robust resources of the Lutheran  
203 heritage, this church responds to God's call to justice with the following commitments to  
204 promote and support action toward a more equitable life together in Christ.  
205

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<sup>5</sup> These principles are evident throughout ELCA social teaching and policy. Examples include the social statements *Caring for Creation*; *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*; and *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*. Visit [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).

206 24) This church recognizes that the Body of Christ is called to honor and support women and  
207 girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences in ways more consistent  
208 with life-giving theology and faith practices. As a church, we commit ourselves to celebrating  
209 and affirming the gifts and insights that women and girls bring to every expression and  
210 dimension of this church.

211  
212 *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America specifically commits to:*

213  
214 25) Promote the practice and use of scriptural translation and interpretation that acknowledge  
215 the contexts in which the Scriptures were written and reject the misuse of Scripture that has  
216 supported sexist attitudes and patriarchal structures.

217  
218 26) Promote theological reflection that responds to the gender-based needs of the neighbor.  
219 Teachers and theologians need to be honest about how church teachings have been misused to  
220 support patriarchy and sexism. More importantly, this church calls upon its teachers and  
221 theologians to work toward worthier expressions of the historic faith that honor God’s desire for  
222 all people to thrive.

223  
224 27) Use **inclusive language** (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and **expansive**  
225 **language** (other than human) for God. This church is committed to the deepest Christian  
226 understanding of the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining  
227 and speaking about God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God’s  
228 self-revelation and mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and  
229 educational materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language. This practice  
230 follows the scriptural witness that God transcends human categories. Therefore, as in the  
231 Scriptures, metaphors for and images of God should be drawn frequently from the lives of people  
232 of all identities and experiences and gleaned from nature in all its diversity. Employing inclusive  
233 and expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the  
234 God of beauty and love who reveals God’s self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.

235  
236 28) Develop and support more extensive policies and practices within the ELCA that  
237 promote equitable authority and leadership within this church in all its expressions. In many  
238 instances this requires promoting the leadership of women, with special concern for women of  
239 color. In other cases, this means promoting the participation of men in more varied roles,  
240 including those traditionally seen as “women’s work.”

241  
242 29) Promote changes that are economically just, including equitable pay and benefits, for  
243 women in all ELCA institutions and organizations, with special attention to the situations of  
244 people affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

245  
246 30) Seek and encourage faithful dialogue, discernment, and, when possible, joint action on  
247 issues of patriarchy and sexism with other members of the body of Christ and with partners of  
248 other religions and worldviews. As a member of a global communion, the ELCA affirms the  
249 Lutheran World Federation’s “Gender Justice Policy.”

250 ([https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS\\_Gender\\_Justice.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf))

251

## V. Response:

### The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society.

31) This church teaches that the God who justifies expects all people to seek justice in earthly relationships, structures, and systems. The ELCA calls for sustained and renewed efforts through which women, girls, and **gender non-conforming** people experience greater equity and justice. The following commitments express this church's firm hope for renewed social relationships and structures that benefit the common good.

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to:*

32) Advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them. Women, girls and people who identify as **non-binary** must not be deprived of their human or civil rights. (See the ELCA's social message "Human Rights," [www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)

33) Advocate for and support the eradication of **gender-based violence** within the church and more broadly in society by addressing both the systemic aspects of such violence and the personal responsibility of those who perpetrate harm. (See the ELCA's social messages "Gender-based Violence" and "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," [www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)

34) Advocate for and support medical research, health care delivery, and access to equitable and affordable health care services, including **reproductive health care**, that honor how bodies differ and eliminate discrimination due to sex (biological), gender, or sexual orientation. (See the ELCA social statements *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* and *Abortion*, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).)

35) Advocate for and support economic policies, regulations, and practices that enhance equity and **equality** for women and girls, with special concern for raising up women and girls who experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA's social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).)

36) Advocate for and support multifaceted understandings of social and economic roles so that neither our human traits (such as courage or compassion) nor our callings (such as business leader or stay-at-home parent) are dictated by our sex (biological) and gender. Encourage and empower all people to use their gifts for the sake of the common good, whether at home, at work, or in the public sphere.

37) Advocate for and support resources for families of various configurations and the communities in which they live. Empower parents and all who raise or care for children or other family members to nurture, protect, and provide for their households in ways that do not reinforce gender-based stereotypes. In particular, advocate for institutional changes that support and encourage men and boys to participate in all family roles associated with the home, caregiving, parenting, and nurturing.

297 38) Advocate for and support legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for  
298 migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially those who experience  
299 intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA’s social message “Immigration,”  
300 [www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)

301  
302 39) Advocate for and support portrayals in entertainment, media, and advertising that do not  
303 objectify or stereotype people but rather show all people as capable of the wide variety of human  
304 characteristics and roles.

305  
306 40) Advocate for and support means for increasing women’s participation in local, state, and  
307 national politics, with special attention to the proportionate advocacy and support needed by  
308 those who face intersecting forms of oppression.



309 **Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action**  
310 **Full Statement**  
311

312 **A Shared Vision:**  
313 **We trust God’s promises, and we hope for justice.**  
314

315 We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) rejoice that God is always at  
316 work to transform and inspire us to new ways of living, ways that more fully embody God’s  
317 intention of abundant life. However, due to sexism, many are deprived of God’s good intention  
318 that all flourish. Over time and in many places, people have made changes to counter the effects  
319 of sexism. Yet we accept that we are called to seek even fuller measures of justice and equity for  
320 all those affected by this sin. We do not presume to have quick, perfect, or easy solutions as we  
321 work together with all people who strive for justice in the world. Yet, grounded in God’s  
322 promises, we know that Christians have both the freedom and the responsibility to serve all  
323 neighbors in love.

324 In the Book of Isaiah, God sends the prophet “to bring good news to the oppressed, to  
325 bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to  
326 proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor” (Isaiah 61:1b-2a). God promises new heavens and a new  
327 earth—for all God’s people. God envisions not only healing and freedom from bondage, but also  
328 gladness, joy, and abundant and flourishing life for all people, which we will feel even in the  
329 bones of our bodies (Isaiah 65-66). Mirroring a mother’s care for her child (Isaiah 66:13), God  
330 desires harmony and integrity for individuals and communities, physically and spiritually. God’s  
331 promise of new creation is the vision of what will come to be and the assurance of God’s  
332 faithfulness. What hardly seems possible will be possible, for even the wolf and the lamb will  
333 feed together (Isaiah 65:25).

334 In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims at the beginning of his ministry that he is the one  
335 through whom God acts to bring good news to the oppressed and captive, to heal, and to set free.  
336 Women respond to God’s promise. Mary proclaims God’s favor. An unnamed woman anoints  
337 Jesus’ feet. Women—among them, Mary and Martha—follow Jesus publicly and use their means  
338 to support Jesus’ ministry. A bleeding woman trusts in Jesus’ power to heal. Mary Magdalene,  
339 Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women” witness the empty tomb and the  
340 angels who announce the resurrection of Jesus; they spread the word that God reaches from the  
341 promised future to raise Jesus Christ to new life, as the first fruit of the new creation. (See Luke  
342 1:39-56; 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 8:42b-48; 10:38-42; and 24:1-12; and I Cor. 15:20-23.) The incarnate  
343 and risen Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new creation God promises.

344 We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America join the witness of these women and  
345 live in the hope of God’s promise of new creation through the life, death, and resurrection of  
346 Jesus Christ. We offer thanksgiving to the holy Trinity, whose love intends an abundant life for  
347 every person (John 10:10). We live in hope, anticipating God’s promise of a just world without  
348 the oppression of sin and evil. God’s vision in Isaiah is that people live in gladness, joy, safety,  
349 and harmony until old age—so that “your bodies shall flourish like the grass” (Isaiah 66:14).

350 We believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work through God in Jesus Christ to  
351 transform us, to draw us into the promised life of the new creation. In this church, we confess  
352 that we ourselves are always being made a new creation in Christ through baptism. Who we are

353 becoming in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit gives meaning to who we are and how we act  
354 right now.

355 Society and the Church universal are gifts from God. Nevertheless, personal, social, and  
356 religious forces often work in opposition to God’s desire for abundant and flourishing life for all.  
357 This church sees and denounces all the ways human sin interferes with flourishing. With  
358 thanksgiving for God’s gracious promise through Jesus Christ to break the bonds of sin, this  
359 church lives in the confidence that we are always being made new to love and serve the  
360 neighbor.

361 Love of neighbor is expressed in seeking justice for the neighbor. This includes gender  
362 justice. Gender justice is for all people and requires particular attention to seeking fuller justice  
363 for women and girls. Because we rely on God as a God of promise, this church speaks about  
364 sexism and the harm it causes for all people. Those who support gender justice are intent on  
365 righting gender-based wrongs that prevent the abundant and flourishing life God intends.

366 We in this church rejoice in the ways God’s people are already being led forth in joy  
367 (Isaiah 55:12). We are thankful God gives the vision and sustenance to change what seems  
368 unchangeable, even as we wait for God to wipe away every tear (Isaiah 25:8). Most of all, we  
369 live in hope because, through Jesus Christ, we trust that God’s promises will not fail.  
370

## 371 **I. Fundamental Teaching:** 372 **God desires abundant life for all.**

373 *1) We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God’s intention revealed through*  
374 *the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and flourish.*  
375

376 From creation to redemption in the Christian story, the Scriptures reveal God’s intention  
377 of abundant and flourishing life for creation, including for human beings. On the sixth day of  
378 creation, “God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis  
379 1:31a). Creation stories tell of the goodness, flourishing, and majestic diversity that flow from  
380 God’s creative and sustaining power (e.g., Genesis 1 and 2, Psalms 8 and 104, and Job 38).  
381 Throughout the stories of the life of God’s people in ancient Israel, God is ever-present, willing  
382 them into flourishing life and often showing them ways out of situations that seem to have no  
383 way out.<sup>6</sup>

384 The Gospels underscore God’s desire for abundant life. Jesus Christ, the Word made  
385 flesh, embodies and proclaims God’s desire. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, “I came that  
386 they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). Jesus put this into action by eating  
387 with everyone, including marginalized people (Mark 2:15). Jesus lived compassionately, healing  
388 and casting out evil spirits (Matthew 14:14). Jesus criticized those who neglect justice and mercy  
389 (Matthew 23:23) and delivered God’s call to respond to the needs of anyone who is  
390 disadvantaged, marginalized, and unjustly treated (Matthew 25:35-40). Jesus Christ embodied  
391 God’s urgent and persistent desire for the well-being of all people yesterday, today, tomorrow,  
392 and in the promised, future life.

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<sup>6</sup> The adage that God provides a way out of no way comes from African-descent religious traditions and is developed by Delores S. Williams in *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993). Two examples of God’s provision are the stories of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21 and the Israelites’ passage through the Red Sea in Exodus 10.

393 The Book of Revelation speaks of the healing of the nations and closes with a vision of  
394 new heavens and earth as the ultimate outcome of God’s resolve (Revelation 22:1-2). This  
395 church believes the triune God intends creation to flourish and is ever at work so that all people  
396 may thrive.

397  
398 *2) We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent*  
399 *upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation*  
400 *flourish. Being in the image of the triune God means that we humans are relational, that we are*  
401 *interconnected. Just as we interact with God, we are social creatures relating with each other*  
402 *and all of creation.*

403 As the Scriptures witness, all of creation originates from God, who sustains creation and  
404 will ultimately bring creation to its fullness. In Genesis 1, God speaks creation into existence; by  
405 a word, humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). “Then God said, ‘Let us make  
406 *’ādām* [the Hebrew word for “humankind”] in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis  
407 1:26a).<sup>7</sup> Human dignity flows from the reality that all humans are made in the image of God.  
408 When we see one another, we see the image of God.

409 In the ancient world, typically only kings were thought to be in the image of God.  
410 Genesis offers a striking contrast to a hierarchical view that sets rulers over those they rule or  
411 men over women. The point of the creation story in Genesis 1 is that all humankind is created at  
412 the same time and with the same value, in the image of God.

413 The account of creation in Genesis 2 emphasizes human dependence upon God as the one  
414 who gives us life and breath. In this text, God makes humans by forming them from the soil  
415 (*humus*), the source of trees and all vegetation. Humanity comes to life only when God breathed  
416 the breath of life into the first human.

417 In both Genesis 1 and 2, the emphasis is on God’s creation of humankind in unity and  
418 **equality**.<sup>8</sup> A translation of the Hebrew text helps to explain this:

419 “then Yahweh God formed the earth creature [hā-’ādām]

420 dust from the earth [hā-’ādāmâ]

421 and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life,

422 and the earth creature [hā-’ādām] became a living *nephesh* [being]” (Genesis 2:7).<sup>9</sup>

423 In Hebrew, the word for “Adam” means “earth creature;” it is not a proper name but a poetic  
424 play upon the Hebrew word for earth. English translations of Genesis refer to “Adam” being  
425 formed first and refer to this earth creature as a male, but the original language never suggests  
426 that a man was created first.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it recounts the creation of all humanity. Only later does the  
427 text refer to distinct bodies, called “Adam” and “Eve.”

428 The differentiation of humankind expressed in the creation stories communicates the joy  
429 humans find in having true partners, true peers: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my  
430 flesh” (Genesis 2:23a). God creates community and family within an interdependent creation that  
431 wholly depends upon its creator, not upon a **hierarchy** of humans.

432 The Scriptures reveal the diversity and interconnectedness of creation. God creates a  
433 teeming universe filled with plants and animals, the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and

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<sup>7</sup> See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18, 78.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Translation by Phyllis Trible, 78.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-81.

434 humans—all remarkably diverse. We believe God creates humanity in diversity. Scientific  
435 research in conversation with the Christian tradition shows that this diversity encompasses a  
436 wide variety of experiences, identities, and expressions, including **sex** (human biology), **gender**  
437 (how humans understand and express themselves), and **sexuality** (sexual attraction).<sup>11</sup> These are  
438 interconnected yet distinct aspects of humanity.

439 Many Christians, in the past and still today, interpret the creation and fall stories in  
440 Genesis 1-3 to support the belief that females are secondary to males and more sinful than males.  
441 For example, repeating an ancient belief, some early Christian theologians defined women as  
442 malformed men.<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther sometimes repeated the idea that women are inferior. Genesis  
443 has also been used to argue for seemingly fixed realities about human identity based on being  
444 male or female.<sup>13</sup> Some Christian communities and individuals continue to teach and practice  
445 these ideas.

446 The concept of “the image of God” has often been used problematically. Sometimes it  
447 has been used to describe men as a “fuller” image of God and women as a “lesser” image of  
448 God. In particular, the description of the woman being created second, to be the man’s “helper”  
449 (Genesis 2:18), has been used to reinforce the idea that women and girls are inferior and  
450 subordinate. Actually, the Hebrew word translated in English as “helpmate” is a word most often  
451 used in the Scriptures for God! Misuses, misunderstandings, and the limitations of translations  
452 have led to and still reinforce beliefs and actions that devalue women and girls.

453 This church focuses instead on God’s delight in the diversity of creation, as well as God’s  
454 intention of equality, unity, and relationality within that diversity. God says, “Let us make  
455 humanity in our own image.” Just as there is relationality among the persons of the Trinity, there  
456 is relationality between the humans God creates and between God and humans. This reading of  
457 the Scriptures promotes an understanding of human diversity that is not limited by either a  
458 **binary** or a hierarchical view of gender.

459 We honor the image of God in others when we do everything in our collective and  
460 personal power to meet others’ needs and to empower them to flourish. We believe that God  
461 creates human beings not just in marvelous diversity but also with the intention of **equity**,  
462 including gender-based equity. The God in whose image we are made calls us to use our  
463 creativity, freedom, responsibility, diversity, and compassion for the fulfillment of creation. Just  
464 as God uses wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to create and nourish (Proverbs 3:19-29),

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<sup>11</sup> For reference to the science and to an engagement by Christian thinkers, see Patricia Beattie Jung and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *God, Science, Sex, Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010). It is important to note here that recognition of this diversity follows the contemporary scientific consensus. For the ELCA’s teaching about how to regard marriage relations or publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-sex relationships, see *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009), [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Although philosophers Aristotle and Plato initiated the belief that women are inferior to men and potentially “malformed” men, many early Church Fathers maintained a similar understanding of women. See Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious and Philosophical Conceptions of Women's Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 21, 169.

<sup>13</sup> This argument is known as an ontological argument based on what sex a person is. According to a sex-based understanding of humans, there are two kinds of human nature, based strictly on being male or being female. According to this idea, humans are particular, fixed beings strictly set by biological sex. This idea stands in contrast to a different understanding of humanity (a different ontological argument), that there is a single “human beingness” (ontology) in which everyone shares. Understanding humans from this viewpoint allows for the actual diversity of human bodies and characteristics.

465 humans are to use these same means to serve all of creation. In creation, no human is granted  
466 domination over another human. Rather, all are given the responsibility to care for creation,  
467 including the responsibility to address the effects of sin (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15).<sup>14</sup>  
468

469 *3) Despite God's intention for creation, humans exist in a state of sin. Because we fail to trust*  
470 *God as we should, we are alienated from God, from other people, and from creation itself. Not*  
471 *only individually, but also collectively, we live out this alienation through disobedience to God,*  
472 *pride, complacency, self-abasement, and acts against others, all of which limit the abundant life*  
473 *God intends.*

474 As Christians, we understand humanity's fall into a state of sin through the story of Adam  
475 and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "[Y]ou will be like God," (Genesis 3:5b) the serpent promises.  
476 The Genesis story shows that the human desire to be powerful disrupts God's intention for  
477 human flourishing and for the well-being of creation.

478 Sin is a condition in which we humans live because we do not trust God for our sense of  
479 identity and value.<sup>15</sup> This may take the form of pride (being centered on ourselves), idolatry  
480 (placing someone or something else other than God at the center of our lives), or self-abasement  
481 (not recognizing our value and dignity as a person created by God). As a result of this broken  
482 trust in God, human relationships also become broken and distorted. We hurt each other, God's  
483 creation, and ourselves.

484 Particular sinful *actions* (sins) are expressions of our human life in a state of sin.  
485 Individuals, families, communities, institutions, governments, and societies can all sin. Sin is not  
486 only individual; it is also collective or communal. Sinful humans create structures, organizations,  
487 and societies that perpetuate sin, sometimes unintentionally. This is called "structural sin."

488 God gives the Law to help us see humanity's sinful state: our sinful thoughts and actions  
489 and our sinful systems. It also helps to curb these. The Law helps us see that what breaks and  
490 distorts human relationships is sinful and unjust.  
491

492 *4) We believe that we are healed and redeemed from this alienation. That is, Lutherans confess*  
493 *that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what we have done*  
494 *or left undone. This promise means we are freed from bondage to the people and things we trust*  
495 *and love more than God or the ways we try to justify ourselves, sometimes at the expense of*  
496 *others. God's grace frees us and empowers us to love others as God loves all of creation.*

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<sup>14</sup> See Kristen E. Kvam on Luther's reading of Genesis in "God's Heart Revealed in Eden: Luther on the Character of God and the Vocation of Humanity" in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 57-67.

<sup>15</sup> The Lutheran Confessions explain sin fundamentally as the failure to fear and trust God. "Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II," *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 112. The Lutheran Confessions are Reformation-era writings, central to Lutheran theology and practice and constitutionally affirmed by the ELCA.

497 The Lutheran tradition emphasizes that we do not have to do anything for God to be  
498 gracious to us. The gift of salvation is a divine work, not a human work. “For we hold that a  
499 person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Romans 3:28). God’s  
500 justification of us overturns both our own attempts to justify ourselves and our own injustice.  
501 Faith unites believers with Christ; union with Christ transforms believers. God’s redemption of  
502 believers is not simply a transaction but an intimate relationship that influences who we are  
503 becoming in Christ.

504 Although we have been called into the freedom of the Gospel, we remain sinners. Martin  
505 Luther described this as being “simultaneously saint and sinner.” We are freed in Christ to love  
506 and serve others, but our efforts to live out God’s love are always imperfect. Through our  
507 baptism, we experience daily renewal, and so we continue to respond to the divine call to love  
508 God, self, and neighbor and to work for justice.

509  
510 *5) As Lutheran Christians, our focus on Jesus Christ affects how this church understands justice.*  
511 *Because we are freed in Christ for others, we are able to respond to God’s call to love our*  
512 *neighbor as ourselves. In society, neighbor love takes the form of neighbor justice.*

513 The Scriptures repeatedly remind us of God’s call to show love and justice to others. The  
514 prophet Micah insists that what God wants from us is “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to  
515 walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Isaiah provides some specific examples of what this  
516 means: “[L]earn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the  
517 widow” (Isaiah 1:17). The psalms describe the blessing of living according to God’s intention:  
518 “Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times” (Psalm 106:3).

519 In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-33) Jesus teaches that compassion for  
520 others is how we express love for God; neighbors are people who need acts of love. Martin  
521 Luther reflected, “Now our neighbor is any human being, especially one who needs our help.”<sup>16</sup>  
522 Neighbor love means we are called to *be* a neighbor. Depending on the neighbor’s needs, this  
523 may require not only direct service in response to an immediate situation, but also working more  
524 broadly for justice. Because justice is the form love takes in society,<sup>17</sup> we refer to this as  
525 neighbor justice.

526 Faith active in the form of love of neighbor is not our own doing but God’s gift.<sup>18</sup> We  
527 respond to and exercise God’s gift by loving others. In society, this responsive love takes the  
528 form of justice for the neighbor in an unjust world. Grounded in faith and love, we seek justice  
529 for ourselves and our neighbors within congregations, religious and secular institutions,  
530 governments, and societies. This love includes **gender justice**.<sup>19</sup>

531 Reading the Scriptures with a neighbor-justice perspective helps us challenge and uproot  
532 oppression, brokenheartedness, and captivity. This approach can be understood as an extension  
533 of the traditional Lutheran focus on interpreting the Scriptures through the vantage point of the  
534 proclamation of Christ. When, through the Scriptures, we have heard the Good News of  
535 justification by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we are able to return to the Scriptures,  
536 reading them in light of the call to live out our faith in service of our neighbors.

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, “Letters to Galatians, 1535,” *Luther’s Works* (LW) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 27:58.

<sup>17</sup> See Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 160-161.

<sup>18</sup> See *Church in Society* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 2.

<sup>19</sup> See also “The Lutheran World Federation Gender Justice Policy” (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2013), [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS\\_Gender\\_Justice.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf).

537 Striving for justice for the neighbor and for ourselves encourages Christians to live,  
538 worship, and work in ways that empower all people to live with dignity, responsibility, equity,  
539 and justice. God in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, frees the Church to live now  
540 into the future God promises. Both as individuals and as communities, we are called into God's  
541 new creation.

542

543 *6) This focus on Jesus Christ also affects how we understand the Scriptures. While the Scriptures*  
544 *speak both Law and Gospel, Martin Luther emphasized that the Scriptures should be read by*  
545 *paying attention to what proclaims Christ—what carries the Gospel message of God's grace and*  
546 *mercy to all people.*

547 Lutherans understand the Scriptures as speaking both Law and Gospel—God's judgment  
548 and God's promise. Both Law and Gospel are God's Word, but they have different purposes.  
549 God's Law commands us to love God above all else and to live for the sake of the common  
550 good; it judges us when we fail. The Gospel is the promise of God's grace and mercy freely  
551 given to us for Christ's sake.

552 Luther taught that Christians should read the Scriptures through the lens of the Gospel  
553 promise: "The Gospel itself is our guide and instructor in the Scriptures."<sup>20</sup> Being guided by the  
554 Gospel helps Christians interpret difficult texts in the Scriptures in light of the Good News of  
555 Jesus Christ.

556 This way of reading the Scriptures also frees us to look at the Scriptures within their  
557 historical and cultural contexts.<sup>21</sup> Some things apply to people in every generation, and some  
558 things do not. For example, Luther pointed out that some of the Old Testament laws were given  
559 by God to the Jewish people at particular times in their history; these laws do not necessarily  
560 apply to Christians today.<sup>22</sup> Luther even warned against the temptation of "changing Christ into a  
561 Moses" by misunderstanding the gift and promise of the Gospel as laws and commandments.<sup>23</sup>

562 Because of this Christ-centered focus, Lutherans not only interpret but also translate the  
563 Scriptures in ways that keep proclamation of God's Word central. When Luther translated the  
564 Scriptures from Hebrew and Greek into German, he took great care to use language that  
565 Germans of his day could understand. Sometimes this meant using common German idioms  
566 instead of a literal, word-for-word translation of the original languages. Sometimes this meant  
567 adding a word to emphasize the central proclamation.<sup>24</sup> Luther always translated the Scriptures  
568 so that the living Word of God could be received by people in their context.

569

570 *7) As Lutheran Christians, we recognize human reason and knowledge as gifts from God to be*  
571 *used for the common good. While the scriptural call to neighbor justice is clear, human reason*  
572 *and knowledge are essential to discern the specific forms, policies, and structures that best*  
573 *enable us to enact justice in particular contexts. Recognizing that the gifts of reason and*  
574 *knowledge are given to people of all religions and worldviews, Christians are freed to work*  
575 *together with them for the common good.*

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, 1522," *LW* 35:123.

<sup>21</sup> See the ELCA "Book of Faith" initiative's emphases on reading the Scriptures, <http://www.bookoffaith.org>.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525," *LW* 35:170-172.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, 1522," *LW* 35:123.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, "On Translating—An Open Letter, 1530" and "Defense of the Translation of the Psalms, 1531," *LW* 35.

576 The Lutheran theological tradition places a strong emphasis on the appropriate use of  
577 human reason and knowledge. Thus, this statement draws on current scientific research,  
578 including the social sciences. It also assumes that such values as human rights are commonly  
579 shared. While sin can distort our use of these gifts, they remain important tools for work in the  
580 world, especially as common ground for working with others.

581 This church recognizes that people of other religions and worldviews may accept some of  
582 the analysis and share many of the convictions expressed here. For example, many individuals of  
583 other religions and worldviews believe that all people, including every woman and girl, deserve  
584 full human dignity, equality, equity, and the opportunity to thrive. Many others share the  
585 conviction of this church that all people have the responsibility to seek and safeguard universal  
586 rights for others, as well as for themselves.

587 With thanks to God for the gift of reason, the ELCA offers this statement as a  
588 contribution to public discussion about how to understand and advance full and equitable  
589 participation of women and girls in an equitable society. This statement is an invitation to  
590 conversation with and action by those who may not share the same starting point of faith but who  
591 share underlying values, such as human dignity. This church seeks to join in common cause with  
592 all who desire that all people may thrive.

593

594 *8) We believe that the Church is called to live as the body of Christ in the world even while we*  
595 *struggle with the realities of sin. As Lutherans, we recognize that acting justly within family,*  
596 *church, and society for the common good is central to the vocation to which God calls all*  
597 *people.*

598 As Christians, we confess that Jesus Christ is the true image of God (Colossians 1:15). In  
599 baptism, all Christians are unified in Christ and are equal members of the body of Christ. The  
600 apostle Paul compared the early Christian community to the human body. He wrote that  
601 Christians are united in the body of Christ, that this body has many diverse parts, and that the  
602 members of the body need one another. Members of the body that we think are weaker than  
603 others are, in fact, indispensable. (See Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-18.) The body of  
604 Christ is made of physical bodies, of human persons. The health of the body of Christ is linked to  
605 our human flesh and blood.

606 In the face of ever-present ways in which we humans sin against each other, including in  
607 this church, we confess that God's Word affirms the goodness of our bodies, minds, and spirits  
608 and those of our neighbors. The Gospels testify to the full, embodied humanity of Jesus, who  
609 was born, walked, ate, slept, and wept. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels, and the New  
610 Testament letters all teach that human bodies are a good gift of God.

611 Because of our understanding of the body of Christ, we are called not to objectify other  
612 people, diminish their worth, or define them by gender-based stereotypes. Paul taught that what  
613 happens to one part of the body affects every part of the body. This church seeks to value all  
614 people and recognize that we depend upon one another. We will not dominate or politicize other  
615 people but will respect them, promote their health and well-being, and suffer and rejoice together  
616 as we strive for justice for all bodies—indeed, for all persons.



## II. Analysis of the Problem:

### Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.

9) *Though God desires fullness of life and equity for everyone, as a church we recognize that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to sex (biological), gender, or both. In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality, immigration status, sexuality, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied experiences, and education. This reality is known as intersectionality.<sup>25</sup> This statement's references to women and girls are intended to be inclusive of all people who identify as women or girls in the diversity of their individual and communal identities and expressions.*

Grounded in the Scriptures and in Christ, the living Word of God, this church affirms that God creates humanity in diversity and desires all in creation to flourish. However, everyone does not flourish. Talking about this reality requires care and attention to the language and framework we use to understand the complexities of the situation and to serve all our neighbors adequately.

**Intersectionality** refers to the ways in which various forms of discrimination and oppression, linked to aspects of a person's identity, overlap. The concept of intersectionality helps to express the multiple discriminations many women face daily.

This church recognizes that each person is uniquely created in God's image and that each person's identity consists of different aspects. One individual might be a mother, an employee, a Christian, and a college graduate; she might be middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, Spanish-speaking, and Latina. Some aspects of this woman's identity are affirmed by the dominant culture in the United States (e.g., Christian, college graduate), yet other aspects are devalued (e.g., Spanish-speaking, Latina). Broadly speaking, the dominant culture treats some identities as ideal (e.g., white, able-bodied, heterosexual) and other identities as less than ideal, or even imperfect (e.g., person of color, older adult, lesbian). What the dominant culture affirms affects people's lives.

Many women experience intersectional **sexism**. For a woman of color, sexism in the workplace is compounded by the discriminatory effects of racism. If someone is also **transgender**, data show staggering levels of discrimination and violence. Intersectionality helps to explain why some women and girls benefit more than others within a society that operates with intersectional patterns of dominance and submission. For example, white women in the predominant culture in North America benefit at the expense of women of color. This is illustrated in arrangements in which women of color are often caregivers for the children of affluent white women.

Therefore, references to women and girls in this document mean *all* people who identify as women and girls. A word such as *women* often fails to convey its full meaning because our minds tend to default either to our own experiences and identities or to what the culture validates as a normative, "desired," or dominant meaning.

In the United States, the word *women* has been typically associated with being white, young, and heterosexual unless qualified with other adjectives. The life stories, challenges,

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<sup>25</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167.

659 hopes, and gifts of women of color, lesbian and other **queer** women, transgender women, women  
660 with disabilities, and immigrant women, for example, have been often ignored and sometimes  
661 maligned. By using *women and girls* to refer to us in all our diversity, this church seeks to shift  
662 our thinking from limitation or discrimination to inclusiveness.

663 This statement acknowledges both the usefulness and the complexity of the phrase  
664 *women and girls*. Social, cultural, economic, religious, and political groups use *women* to  
665 describe women’s experiences that differ from the experiences of many men. Nevertheless, the  
666 phrase should not be used to give the impression that all women and girls have the same  
667 experiences, gifts, or identities.

669 *10) The experiences of women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, both in the past and in*  
670 *the present moment, reveal that they have often been restricted in realizing abundant life on the*  
671 *basis of sex (biological) or gender.*

672 Women and girls from a variety of identities and backgrounds experience forms of  
673 oppression that affect our lives in profound and intimate ways. The personal experiences of  
674 women and girls are connected with larger social, institutional, and religious forces. For  
675 example, in the United States many legal rights were granted to women only over the course of  
676 the 20th century. These include the rights to vote, serve on juries, own land or businesses, inherit  
677 property, divorce, retain custody of their children, inherit property, and attend any school for  
678 which they are qualified.

679 However, even when these rights were legislated, factors such as race and ethnicity,  
680 education, wealth, and social class intersected to exclude many women. This was the case for  
681 women of African descent, who struggled for many of those same rights decades later in the  
682 Civil Rights Movement. Even in the latter half of the 20th century, women still had to struggle  
683 to secure rights pertaining to voting rights, safety, health care, and public life.

684 Legal, social, and religious forces continue to curb women’s and girl’s rights and prevent  
685 them from affirming, celebrating, and expressing themselves fully as God’s good creatures and  
686 flourishing. The situation is extensive and complex.<sup>26</sup> Poverty and economic insecurity  
687 negatively affect women’s lives. Far fewer women than men have access to wealth, and in the  
688 United States more women than men live in or at the edge of poverty. This is especially true for  
689 older adults, single women, divorced women, women of color, women living with disabilities,  
690 and child brides, which a number of states allow. Poverty rates among women and children in  
691 Native American and Native Alaskan communities, for instance, suggest that sexism is  
692 compounded by racism.

693 Women’s earnings are not equal to men’s earnings. Occupational pay disparities affect  
694 women’s earnings. More women than men work in service industries, which typically pay less  
695 than other occupations. In addition, women in the United States on average earn less than their  
696 male peers earn with equivalent experience and expertise. This wage gap is even wider for most  
697 women of color. Furthermore, there are wide income disparities within groups of women by race  
698 and ethnicity. The term *glass ceiling* refers broadly to gender-based limits on employment, but  
699 women of African descent women also experience what is known as “the black ceiling,” and  
700 Asian women experience what is referred to as “the bamboo ceiling.”

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<sup>26</sup> The reader should consult the User’s Guide that accompanies this statement or the many reputable resources for contemporary facts and figures that support claims in this article.

701 Work, money, and violence often are intertwined. Some occupations, such as food  
702 service and agriculture, are particularly fraught with gender-based discrimination and violence.  
703 Work-place and educational harassment and assault directed at women and girls curtail their  
704 safety, productivity, and livelihood.

705 The ELCA has teaching and policy on **gender-based violence** that guides this church in  
706 greater specificity.<sup>27</sup> On average, women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities  
707 experience high rates of gender-based violence. This violence includes but is not limited to  
708 **domestic violence**; intimate partner violence; sexual assault; rape; **human trafficking**;  
709 pornography; female genital mutilation; early and forced marriages; cyber bullying, stalking, and  
710 harassment; and murder.

711 Although men and boys experience some of these forms of violence, women and girls  
712 experience the majority of them at the hands of men and boys. Racism particularly compounds  
713 gender-based violence for some communities of color. For example, the Centers for Disease  
714 Control and Prevention have consistently reported that Native American and Native Alaskan  
715 women suffer greater rates of gender-based violence and assault at rates greater than do other  
716 ethnic groups. Society often blames women for gender-based crimes and oppression, excusing  
717 the perpetrators. A prime example lies in this society's culture of sexualized violence.

718 Objectifying and assaulting people, particularly sexually, has long been tolerated, often to  
719 the point where gender-based objectification and assault seem normal. **Objectification** and the  
720 normalization of assault are evident in the media we consume (including pornography),<sup>28</sup> the  
721 games we play, the male role models we idolize, the jokes we tell, and the behaviors we tolerate.  
722 Many of these distortions spring from stereotypes, not only of white women but also women of  
723 color. It is further evident in the low rates of conviction and penalty in rape cases and the high  
724 number of untested rape kits across this country. All these factors together can be described as  
725 **rape culture**.

726 U.S. health care policies and practices also affect women's and girls' very own bodies.  
727 Because health care in the United States has developed from a male-centered model of  
728 physiology, disease, and well-being, the medical system sometimes operates as if women do not  
729 know their own bodies or as if their bodies are not their own.

730 Here again, women's health problems and the sexism of health care are compounded by  
731 intersectionality. For instance, women of African descent on all economic levels suffer from high  
732 rates of infant and maternal mortality, and many Latina women lack the **reproductive** and  
733 maternal health care they need.

734 A lack of affordable health care means many women do not get the care they need. In  
735 many regions, laws restrict women's access to reproductive health care. In the 20th century,  
736 many women and girls were forcibly sterilized because they were considered less valuable than  
737 white or able-bodied women. Forced sterilization continues, often in prison systems.

738 Bodies are further managed, manipulated, exaggerated, and made invisible by the media  
739 based on age, skin color, and body type. Not every type of woman and girl is shown in the  
740 media. Entertainment, beauty, and fashion-industry standards and practices promote narrow,  
741 unrealistic images of "acceptable" women's bodies, erasing "unacceptable" lines, spots, colors,

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<sup>27</sup> For a fuller explanation of this church's teaching on gender-based violence, see "Gender-based Violence" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Gender-Violence>.

<sup>28</sup> Commercial Sexual Exploitation (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001), <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation>.

742 or features. The ideals generated by these industries shape the way people think about their  
743 bodies. Many women and girls develop eating disorders or seek plastic surgery as they pursue an  
744 idealized version of womanhood or girlhood.

745 Despite this cultural obsession with “perfect” women, sports, journalism, and  
746 entertainment (including Hollywood movies) are largely focused on men and boys and what they  
747 do. Even language referring to people in society is male-identified, with words such as mankind,  
748 chairman, alderman, guys, etc.

749 Women constitute a minority in U.S. civic and business leadership. The number of  
750 women holding political office is growing but still significantly lower than in other nations.  
751 There are prominent women in business, but the total number of women in top leadership  
752 positions with access to wealth and decision-making is still disproportionately small. Women  
753 who do hold office and prominent leadership roles in society often experience overt and indirect  
754 hostility, including gender-based discrimination, speech, and threats.

755 Religious institutions in the United States may limit and prevent women and girls from  
756 affirming, celebrating, and expressing themselves fully as God’s good creatures and from  
757 flourishing as God desires. Women of color continue to be woefully underrepresented in  
758 religious leadership. In this church, for example, there are gender-based inequities and  
759 discrimination related to compensation and benefits, authority and leadership, and harassment  
760 and violence.<sup>29</sup>

761

762 *11) The far-reaching harm experienced by women and girls is rooted in a pattern of power,*  
763 *privilege, and prejudice, the key elements in any social system of oppression. This is the basis of*  
764 *the ELCA’s understanding of racism.<sup>30</sup> When power, privilege, and prejudice are associated with*  
765 *sex, gender, and sexuality, sociologists use the terms patriarchy and sexism.<sup>31</sup>*

766 *Patriarchy is a social system dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on*  
767 *men’s actions, voices, and authority. Patriarchy does not mean that males are bad, and females*  
768 *are good, or that only males support this unfair system. However, in patriarchal systems, men*  
769 *are typically viewed as superior to women, are given more power than women, and have more*  
770 *authority than women. A patriarchal worldview and way of life grants male privilege. Sexism is*  
771 *the reinforcement of male privilege, which leads to discrimination. It promotes the silencing,*  
772 *controlling, and devaluing of women, girls, and people whose gender expression is different from*  
773 *the conventional expressions of masculinity and femininity.*

774 *Because people live within social and religious systems, everyone knowingly or*  
775 *unknowingly participates in this patriarchal system. Although patriarchy and sexism affect*  
776 *different people in different ways, as individuals we are socialized to conform to these patterns of*  
777 *power, privilege, and prejudice. This makes us complicit in maintaining social systems of*  
778 *oppression.*

779 Although the dominant culture in the United States often emphasizes individualism, the  
780 Scriptures and human reason also stress the importance of social or communal understandings of  
781 life and the world. To respond in love to the problems experienced by women, girls, and people

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<sup>29</sup> For up-to-date information on these issues in recurring church studies, visit [www.ELCA.org](http://www.ELCA.org). To date, reports have been posted on the 25th, 35th, and 45th anniversaries of the ordination of women as pastors.

<sup>30</sup> *Freed in Christ: Race Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995): 4, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).

<sup>31</sup> See Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Past*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University Press, 2014).

782 who identify as **non-binary**, we must move beyond individual experiences to analyze how  
783 **patriarchy** functions as a social system. This church believes we need to address the roots of the  
784 problems that threaten abundant life.

785 An honest assessment of patriarchy can be hard to face, yet it is necessary in order to  
786 address such a complex social reality. Harm and injustice result not simply from the acts of an  
787 individual or group but from policies, laws, attitudes, customs, habits, words, images, and  
788 religious beliefs and practices that inform and sanction those acts.

789 As a society, we have fostered patriarchal values that permeate our social organization  
790 and impair the distribution of goods and services, the application of justice, and the division of  
791 labor. Sexism (that which supports male **privilege**) affects human imagination and convictions,  
792 which influences how individuals and groups understand gender, human bodies, employment,  
793 immigration policies, and gender-based violence. Sexism sustains human trafficking and the  
794 politicization of the female body and health care, including reproductive health care.<sup>32</sup>

795 Because of our convictions about the right use of reason and knowledge in our shared  
796 pursuit of justice, this statement draws on the results of current scientific research as a basis for  
797 our work. A scientific consensus now holds that there are more than two biological sexes and  
798 more than two genders. Studies of humans reveal rich diversity, showing that individuals do not  
799 neatly fall into two categories. Some people are **intersex**: their bodies are neither male nor  
800 female. People have a diversity of characteristics, most of which cannot be assigned exclusively  
801 to one sex or gender or another. Among humans, sex and gender are more accurately  
802 characterized as multidimensional.<sup>33</sup>

803 It is not possible to address patriarchy and sexism without recognizing these scientific  
804 insights. Much harm has been caused by systems and worldviews that assume a binary division  
805 of sex (bodies) and gender (characteristics). These patriarchal systems enforce this binary  
806 division with various levels of control and violence that affect everyone.

807  
808 *12) Although men and boys often benefit from this social system, patriarchal structures and*  
809 *values also harm men and boys, including gay and transgender men. They are harmed when they*  
810 *are pressured to conform to narrow gender stereotypes or are unable to live out a false ideal of*  
811 *male superiority and control. People of all genders who do not conform to gender-based roles*  
812 *and stereotypes often are not seen or valued; sometimes they are violently oppressed and even*  
813 *killed. Men of all racial and ethnic minorities in North America may experience patriarchy and*  
814 *sexism particularly intertwined with white privilege. The message of white-identified patriarchy*  
815 *and sexism is that men and boys of color are not fully men and boys.*

816 Men and boys also suffer mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually from the  
817 dehumanization of patriarchy and sexism, which distorts how they see others and themselves.

818 Misogyny, a deep-seated hatred of the female and feminine, is an ancient problem that  
819 still informs contemporary life, even when unintentional. Misogynistic values can instill men and  
820 boys with a false sense of superiority; patriarchy and sexism can contribute to exaggerated ideals  
821 of dominance and control, usually violent, that men and boys are expected to display. If they fail  
822 to match the ideal model of masculinity, they can be targets of hatred, harassment, bullying, and

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<sup>32</sup> Many of these topics are addressed in ELCA social teaching documents. Visit [ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://ELCA.org/socialstatements) and [ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://ELCA.org/socialmessages).

<sup>33</sup> See Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 176-177, 235-239, and Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

823 violence. These expectations go hand-in-hand with denying and suppressing vulnerability,  
824 empathy, and interdependence. This is **toxic masculinity**. The effect of toxic masculinity is that  
825 men and boys trying to live by its code hurt themselves and others, including other men and  
826 boys. The effect is harm to society.

827 The ideals of patriarchy and sexism can prevent men and boys from having meaningful  
828 friendships with other men and boys, and they are often punished when they try to resist male  
829 privilege or to live in a way that is authentic to their sense of self. Cut off from emotions,  
830 interactions, activities, and careers that are stereotyped as feminine, men and boys are also  
831 denied the fullness of life that is God’s gift. Within broad social and religious systems, we can  
832 end up idolizing men and embracing toxic masculinity.

833 Although this is an overall picture of society, one should note that, within marginalized  
834 communities, patriarchy and sexism affect women and men differently. For example, while black  
835 lives and bodies are valued less than white lives and bodies in the United States, men of African  
836 descent may have more status within their communities than women of African descent do. This  
837 same pattern is largely true in many communities of color. However, within the broader society,  
838 men and boys of color are uniquely affected by sexism because white male privilege operates  
839 against them, too. The message is often that men and boys of color are not “real” men or boys.  
840 The pressure to conform to one idea of white, male-identified humanity denies the diversity of  
841 humans.

842

843 *13) Some social and religious beliefs compound patriarchy. Most instances of gender-based*  
844 *harm are connected to commonly held beliefs and customs. For example, ideas that people are*  
845 *created into a hierarchy based on sex—being only male or female—reinforce and sometimes*  
846 *lead to gender-based injustice.*

847 Early church theologians were often misogynistic, describing women as “the devil’s  
848 gateway” and rebuking them as “a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence.”<sup>34</sup>  
849 Throughout much of the history of the Christian church, women were therefore excluded from  
850 Christian leadership, including ordained leadership; taught to be submissive in marriage, church,  
851 and society; and coerced to endure suffering and violence.

852 In the more recent past, the intersection of patriarchal violence, submission, and  
853 Christianity flourished in the mores and actions of colonialism. The United States was forged  
854 through this colonialism, and its patriarchal values continue to affect many people, including  
855 American Indian and Native Alaska people, often in heightened ways for women and girls from  
856 these various communities. For example, the intersection of state and federal laws and tribal laws  
857 virtually eliminates successful legal recourse in cases of sexual violence against women and girls from  
858 these communities. More broadly, this is illustrated by how people of color continue to experience the  
859 negative effects of colonialism on mental health.

860 Misuse and misinterpretation of the Scriptures within contemporary Christianity has also  
861 reinforced viewpoints and teaching about the inferiority of women. Many Christian churches  
862 continue to support the subservience and obedience of women and girls to men, sometimes in  
863 subtle ways. For example, the belief and practice that men are meant to be the head of the church  
864 and the family and that women are meant to be the followers reinforce a gender-based hierarchy

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<sup>34</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, Book 1, Chapter 1, and Epiphanius, *Panarion*, sect 79.1, respectively.

865 of importance, authority, and value.<sup>35</sup> This is illustrated when some people rebel at having a  
866 pastor who is a woman or when they challenge her ministry, either subtly or explicitly.

867 Throughout history, human beings, including Christians, have often created hierarchies in  
868 which one group dominates another because of their differences. Not all hierarchies are  
869 inherently harmful, but hierarchies based on gender are. The Christian church has often reflected  
870 and taught a pre-Christian belief that all men and women are created with God-given dominant  
871 and subordinate roles. This idea that people exist within a **complementary** hierarchy continues  
872 to affect and infect people’s self-understanding and relationships.

873 Some Christians, both in this country and around the world, strongly believe that men and  
874 women were created to live in complementary relationships with clearly defined roles. This  
875 means that a person’s identity, self-understanding, vocation, and social roles are fixed at birth  
876 and willed by God according to sex (biological) and gender.<sup>36</sup> This understanding of  
877 complementary roles is sometimes described in terms of men and women as “opposites.”

878 Not all persons, however, experience or know themselves to be defined in these ways.  
879 Stereotypes about male and female characteristics cause harm because they shape our  
880 understandings of ourselves and others from a very early age. Limiting certain roles to people  
881 according to their sex or gender interferes with the expression of their full humanity and the  
882 vision of abundant life for all people. Placing these limitations on individuals also diminishes  
883 the social and religious communities in which they live. The idea that humans are to experience  
884 life through gender-based hierarchies contributes to the overwhelming tendency to value what is  
885 male and/or masculine at the expense of what is female and/or feminine. The result is male  
886 privilege, often expressed through toxic masculinity.

887 In Christianity, male privilege has been and continues to be expressed through a male-  
888 identified, male-centered, and male-dominant symbolic universe of language and images.  
889 Through its stories and theological tradition, the Christian imagination focuses on what men and  
890 boys say and do, even when women are part of the story of God’s people from the beginning.  
891 Within the Lutheran tradition, the same holds true for hundreds of years of Reformation thought,  
892 even though women were part of the Reformation movement. Male privilege leads to ignoring  
893 women’s presence, women’s experiences, and women’s voices.

894  
895 *14) The ELCA celebrates that humans are relational beings and that we live in social systems.*  
896 *Positive, equitable social systems can lead to joy and gladness. However, social systems can also*  
897 *have negative consequences.*

898 *Even though individuals make choices within social systems, those systems are more*  
899 *powerful than any individual, government, culture, or religious community. Beliefs and customs*  
900 *are reflected in laws, policies, and practices within both secular and religious institutions, which*  
901 *makes them so systemic that they are difficult to identify and dismantle.*

902 *This church’s commitment to neighbor justice compels us to expose how patriarchy and*  
903 *sexism are woven into individual, social, and religious life, causing harm to all people and even*  
904 *to all of creation.*

905 Social systems are necessary because we are relational beings. When social systems are  
906 detrimental to well-being, the Scriptures refer to them as evil “powers.” (See Ephesians 6:12 and

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<sup>35</sup> This view is an ancient problem rooted in philosophical ideas and in some religious teachings. See David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Codes in 1 Peter* (Chico: Scholars’ Press, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> See Linda Hogan, “Conflicts Within the Roman Catholic Church,” in *Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 343-339, esp. 325-327.

907 Romans 8:38.) These powers dwarf any one individual, community, government, or culture, and  
908 they distort human flourishing. This church recognizes the systemic character of patriarchy in the  
909 way social and religious ideas and beliefs are linked with laws, policies, and practices that result  
910 in injustice. This combination of sexist ideas and beliefs with laws, policies, and practices leads  
911 to and reinforces gender-based harm and injustice, including gender-based violence.

912 The effects of patriarchy and sexism diminish, damage, and often destroy people. Our  
913 church's faith and a commitment to neighbor justice require us to examine the various  
914 components of patriarchy and sexism in order to understand the harm they cause and to seek  
915 renewed, life-giving partnerships and approaches to an equitable society. The call to justice  
916 specifically means that we seek equity and justice for women and girls and others who  
917 experience oppression due to sexism and patriarchy.

918

919 *15) As Christians, we see that patriarchy and sexism prevent all human beings from living into*  
920 *the abundant life for which God created them. Patriarchy and sexism reflect a lack of trust in*  
921 *God and result in harm and broken relationships. Just as this church has identified racism as*  
922 *sin, this church identifies patriarchy and sexism as sin. We confess that, as God's people*  
923 *forgiven in Jesus Christ, we are simultaneously liberated and sinful. We are broken, yet we are*  
924 *made new by grace through faith. This good news is true even as we participate in cultures and*  
925 *societies that are broadly patriarchal and sexist.*

926 Sin is not expressed just in individual acts. Sin is also expressed in organizations and  
927 institutions. Sexism and patriarchy are sinful because they foster attitudes and actions that distort  
928 relationships, violate God's law, and result in injustice. They are social sins that involve and  
929 affect individuals, families, communities, nations, religions, and cultures.

930 Because they are so deeply imbedded in our social systems, the power of patriarchy and  
931 sexism can be largely invisible. Because it is invisible, we are often unaware that everyone  
932 participates in some measure, sometimes in obvious and intentional ways and sometimes in  
933 subtle and unconscious ways. We may hold attitudes and beliefs and support laws, policies, and  
934 practices that harm even ourselves. This is the power of systemic sin.

935 In our liturgy, we name this systemic reality in the confession: "We are captive to sin  
936 and cannot free ourselves." Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we  
937 can identify it as sin, confess it, and, through the grace and strength of God, begin to act  
938 differently. We reject patriarchy and sexism as sinful because they deny the truth that all people  
939 are created equally in God's image and because they disrupt joy, gladness, and flourishing life  
940 for all people.

941

942

### **III. The Christian Tradition: It is both challenge and resource.**

943

944

945 *16) In faith, this church confesses that Christianity has been complicit in the sin of patriarchy*  
946 *and sexism through certain beliefs, practices, and aspects of its history. At the same time, we*  
947 *believe God provides resources within the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition to*  
948 *challenge the harmful beliefs and effects of patriarchy and sexism and to bring forth new ways of*  
949 *living.*

950 Some central emphases of Lutheran theology offer renewed vision and resources for  
951 resisting and dismantling patriarchy and sexism and for transforming social systems. This church  
952 believes that a Lutheran theological perspective rings true with insights into God's gift that we



953 are a new creation in Jesus Christ and can live more fully into that promise by the power of the  
954 Holy Spirit.

955 In our corporate confession, we recognize that we sin individually and collectively in  
956 thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We do not  
957 always live and act as God intends. God's Law helps us to see that we sin and judges us for our  
958 failure to live up to God's intentions. The recognition of our sins leads us to confession. When  
959 we confess, we give up trying to justify ourselves and our actions. By grace, God forgives us,  
960 heals us, and frees us from the state of sin that alienates us from God, neighbors, and ourselves.

961 As a church, we recognize that patriarchy and sexism harm people in many ways. As a  
962 church, we confess that we cannot justify our own participation in sinful ways of thinking,  
963 believing, and acting. We confess that our actions often reflect patriarchal Christian beliefs that  
964 portray women as subservient and inferior to men. As a church, we confess our complicity in the  
965 exclusion, exploitation, and oppression of those who do not reflect idealized understandings of  
966 masculinity. We confess not only overt complicity but also the complicity of silence and passive  
967 acceptance of patriarchal and sexist beliefs and practices.

968 As a church, we also believe and trust God's mercy, love, and forgiveness. We trust that,  
969 through faith, God empowers us to identify resources for abundant and flourishing life within the  
970 Christian tradition, through which God has been at work through all people, including women.  
971 We believe that we share the responsibility to address the ways in which the Christian faith and  
972 tradition have been used to reinforce gender-based actions and attitudes that in particular harm  
973 women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences.

974  
975 *17) The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures. We*  
976 *also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in the*  
977 *Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism. Some aspects*  
978 *of the Scriptures reflect the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse*  
979 *contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm. A Lutheran reading of*  
980 *the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological*  
981 *aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally.*

982 Within the ELCA, we read the Bible in ways that are grounded in our theological heritage  
983 and that can reform sexist uses of the Scriptures. The Word of God is first and foremost Jesus  
984 Christ, God incarnate. Secondly, we encounter the Word as Law and Gospel in preaching and  
985 teaching. The canonical Scriptures are the written Word of God, which proclaims God's grace  
986 and sustains faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> The Word of God is living and active. We accept the written  
987 form of the Word of God as the authoritative source and norm for faith.

988 Nevertheless, we recognize that many biblical texts originated in cultures that were male-  
989 identified and male-dominated, and that they say things about women and girls that we now  
990 recognize as harmful. Genesis 3:16, "[A]nd he shall rule over you," seems to support patriarchy  
991 if read as a reflection of God's original intention for humans rather than as a result of human sin.  
992 Other Scriptural texts relate chilling acts of male domination, such as a host offering his  
993 unmarried daughter to a mob of men to dissuade them from raping a Levite man (Judges 19).  
994 Many Christian communities struggle with how to interpret such texts.

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<sup>37</sup> *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987), 2.02, [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions\\_Bylaws\\_and\\_Continuing\\_Resolutions\\_of\\_the\\_ELCA.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions_Bylaws_and_Continuing_Resolutions_of_the_ELCA.pdf).

995 The New Testament reflects what now are understood as patriarchal values of various  
996 cultures through its rules and ideals about women. Scholars refer to these New Testament texts  
997 as “the household codes.” One example seems to tie salvation to women’s fertility: “[Women]  
998 will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with  
999 modesty” (1 Timothy 2:15). Another example admonishes wives to obey their husbands and  
1000 instructs them on how to dress. Although husbands are told to be considerate and respect their  
1001 wives, they are told women are “the weaker sex” (1 Peter 3:1-7; see also 1 Corinthians 11:6).

1002 We recognize that the Scriptures have been interpreted within the Lutheran faith in ways  
1003 that accept these limits on women and girls and sanction relationships of power and domination.  
1004 Likewise, these interpretations grant men roles that afford them agency, decision-making power,  
1005 leadership, and prominence in communities and societies. The result is an **androcentric**  
1006 tradition. Our tradition’s complicity in patriarchy and sexism is connected to such biblical  
1007 interpretation.

1008 This misuse of the Scriptures continues to foster inequity based on sex (biological) and  
1009 gender. It subverts the abundant life God intends. Even today some would deny women positions  
1010 of leadership in the church or in society, calling the arrangement “natural” and citing such  
1011 scriptural texts as “[W]omen should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to  
1012 speak, but should be subordinate. . . . For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1  
1013 Corinthians 14:34-35).

1014 This church believes that God calls Christians into a different vision. Jesus Christ calls us  
1015 to a new kind of freedom in service to God and neighbor. This is not a revision of the Lutheran  
1016 tradition but a reaffirmation of its core emphasis. As Lutherans, we interpret the Scriptures in  
1017 light of the Gospel promise. This emphasis on the Gospel as God’s promise characterizes a  
1018 Lutheran reading of Scripture.

1019 When scriptural passages are unclear or even contradictory, this Lutheran reading  
1020 suggests that Christ, as God’s gift of forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life, is the lens through  
1021 which such passages are to be read. Our church, for instance, places more weight on Galatians  
1022 3:28 (“[T]here is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”) because of  
1023 its Gospel focus, than on 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over  
1024 a man”). This church’s teaching about how to interpret the Scriptures reinforces this Gospel  
1025 orientation. In this way, Scripture interprets Scripture.

1026 This church emphasizes a fourfold reading of the Scriptures: devotional, historical,  
1027 literary, and theological.<sup>38</sup> We recognize that some passages were given to God’s faithful people  
1028 in specific historical contexts that are quite different from our own.<sup>39</sup> This is why, for example,  
1029 Christians no longer feel bound by certain Old Testament laws, such as kosher dietary principles,  
1030 or by New Testament instructions concerning women’s hairstyles, jewelry, and clothing  
1031 (1 Timothy 2:9). Our fidelity to the Scriptures does not require us to conform to the social and  
1032 cultural practices of the ancient world. Similarly, this Lutheran interpretive practice extends to  
1033 the writings of our tradition.

1034 Although the Scriptures sometimes reflect patriarchal structures and values, this does not  
1035 mean that God has prescribed patriarchal structures and values. We read the written Word guided  
1036 by Christ the living Word speaking today. We do so for the sake of proclaiming a life-giving  
1037 word for all people. This approach interprets the Scriptures with an emphasis on what the Word

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<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.bookoffaith.org/>.

<sup>39</sup> See *Word and Sacrament I*, “How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525,” LW 35:170-172.

1038 does; it frees us to read the Scriptures in such a way that God’s Word can be heard as genuinely  
1039 “good news.”

1040  
1041 *18) The Christian theological tradition is full of ideas and teaching that can negatively or*  
1042 *positively affect people. In particular, some doctrines affect our understanding of humanity and*  
1043 *God more than others. Teachings about the cross and suffering, the image of God, the*  
1044 *incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity have sometimes been misused to support*  
1045 *patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, church practices, behaviors, and structures. These teachings affect*  
1046 *our use of language and our understandings of humanity and Christian ministry. At the same*  
1047 *time, these doctrines can be liberating resources for healing the effects of the sins of patriarchy*  
1048 *and sexism.*

1049 Theological images and themes are used in multiple ways. The same concept can be  
1050 understood and applied to reinforce a patriarchal status quo or to support gender justice.

1051 Two interrelated themes of Christian faith have often been misused to encourage women  
1052 and girls to accept and endure harm because they are women and girls. Sometimes Genesis 3:16  
1053 (pain in childbirth) is invoked to teach women and girls that they deserve gender-based suffering.  
1054 Sometimes the language of taking up one’s cross (Mark 8:34) has been used to encourage  
1055 women and girls to endure their pain in order to be like Jesus. Some women report that their  
1056 pastors have characterized domestic violence or rape as “their cross to bear.”

1057 Lutheran theology can help to reject the misuse of these biblical texts in such ways. First,  
1058 Lutheran biblical interpretation reminds us that what is said to Eve about bearing children in pain  
1059 has less to do with punishment than with pain humans experience after the fall.

1060 Second, a theology of the cross can remind us that Jesus Christ suffers on our account.  
1061 We are not called to endure violence for its own sake. We might endure violence because we  
1062 confess faith in Jesus Christ and live as Christians, but women and girls are not called to endure  
1063 gender-based violence. In addition, a Lutheran view of the cross reminds us that we see God  
1064 hidden in suffering; despite Jesus’ feeling of abandonment on the cross, we can confess that God  
1065 is present even in the depths of our worst experiences.

1066 A number of other theological themes have also been misused to affect how Christians  
1067 understand God and humanity. These teachings include the image of God (See Article 2.), the  
1068 incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity.<sup>40</sup> It is important to consider how these beliefs  
1069 about God influence human self-understanding and relationships.

1070 The Christian tradition confesses that God is infinite mystery beyond human  
1071 comprehension. Human language and human concepts about God are never enough to know  
1072 God. Unfortunately, language for and images of God in the Christian faith are often  
1073 androcentric—male-centered or male-identified. Insistence on predominantly male-oriented  
1074 language and images restricts our understanding of God, who is beyond gender, to one human  
1075 category. This narrows our theology, our thinking about God. The use of only male language  
1076 leads us to forget the incomprehensible mystery of God and can reduce the living God to an  
1077 understanding of God to the figure of an infinitely powerful man. This is flawed theology.

1078 In addition, insisting on only male language can make maleness itself a false idol. It can  
1079 persuade Christians that men have more in common with God than women and thus that  
1080 maleness is a higher form of humanity. This is flawed theological anthropology—thinking about  
1081 humans—and is pastorally harmful. If God is understood as male and women are seen as inferior  
1082 to men, one can easily justify attitudes and behaviors that discriminate against and devalue

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<sup>40</sup> See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

1083 women, girls, and people whose gender identity and expression fall outside of familiar  
1084 categories. Taking God literally as male or only masculine also alienates people who are  
1085 intersex.

1086 Many voices in the Christian church have argued that the maleness of Jesus justifies  
1087 sexist ideas and structures in church and society. Many Christians, including some in predecessor  
1088 bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, have argued that only men should serve  
1089 as heads of the church and the home, in part because Jesus was a man. In the New Testament and  
1090 in Christian thought, Jesus was often depicted as a groom promised to a bride (the Church).  
1091 Sometimes this description of the Church as the bride of Christ has contributed to a male-  
1092 identified God and his male-identified representatives in relationship with a female-identified  
1093 Church.

1094 We must reject the idea that the maleness of Jesus is somehow related to redemption. In  
1095 the original Greek, the Nicene Creed makes clear that God the Son became human (*an-thró-*  
1096 *pous*), not male (*anér*), “for us and for our salvation.” The point of the creed is Jesus’ humanity,  
1097 not his sex or gender. The long-time generic use of the word *man* in English translations has  
1098 obscured the original meaning of the Nicene Creed and fed patriarchal biases and assumptions.

1099 The biblical narrative that Jesus was male, compounded by translations that default to  
1100 androcentric language, has led to faulty assumptions about the maleness of the Trinity. However,  
1101 the Scriptures and Christian theology witness to an understanding of God that transcends gender.  
1102 They offer life-giving ways to proclaim the Gospel so that all may receive it and share the Good  
1103 News.

1104 In the Scriptures, God is described as a mother in labor—also as a rock, a hen, and a bear  
1105 (Isaiah 42:14, Psalm 89:26, Matthew 23:37; Hosea 13:8). God is not literally any of these, just as  
1106 God is not literally a man or a father. For instance, Jesus taught, “[W]hat woman having ten  
1107 silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search  
1108 carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:8). Through the prophet Isaiah, God declares, “Can a  
1109 woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these  
1110 may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).

1111 Teachers of the faith have amplified the multiple images within the Scriptures. St.  
1112 Anselm of Canterbury wrote, “But you, Jesus ... Are you not that mother who, like a hen collects  
1113 her chickens under her wing? Truly master, you are a mother.”<sup>41</sup> Julian of Norwich wrote, “A  
1114 mother can hold her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother, Jesus, can lead us in  
1115 friendly fashion into his blessed breast by means of his sweet open side.”<sup>42</sup>

1116 These and other teachers of the faith invert the Savior’s gender to say something  
1117 important about faith in God through Jesus Christ. In fact, the Scriptures make use of gender  
1118 inversion, such as when the apostle Paul compares himself in ministry to a mother in labor  
1119 (Galatians 4:19). Jesus also subverted gender-based expectations when, washing his followers’  
1120 feet, he cast himself in the role of a female slave or a wife—and then called on the male disciples  
1121 to do the same thing (John 13: 3-5, 15).

1122 At the same time, this church’s understanding of the body of Christ goes beyond the  
1123 literal, physical body of Jesus. As Galatians 3:28 reminds us, the body of Christ is inclusive;  
1124 identity markers that we have regarded as irreconcilable no longer hold meanings that divide us.

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

<sup>42</sup> Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) in “Revelations of Divine Love,” Chapter 60, para. 6, based on Isaiah 46:3-4; 49:15.

1125 Just as “Jew or Greek” are not the only ethnic identities joined to and in Christ, so “male and  
1126 female” do not limit the gender identity of those joined to and in Christ. Understanding the unity  
1127 in Christ of persons of various identities frees us from the idolatry of the maleness of Christ—or  
1128 of human maleness.

1129 Although most Christian liturgy favors androcentric and Eurocentric language and  
1130 imagery, **expansive language** and imagery are both scripturally rooted and theologically faithful.  
1131 In their paradoxes and multiplicity, they communicate the mystery and intimacy of the triune  
1132 God. Using inclusive and expansive scriptural and theological language and images therefore  
1133 honors the Lutheran tradition. This church commends all Christians to retrieve and reform  
1134 theological language, images, and themes so that they support faithful proclamations of God’s  
1135 grace in Jesus Christ to all persons.

1136

1137 *19) The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith empowers this*  
1138 *church to challenge patriarchy and sexism, which devalue people according to sinful human*  
1139 *standards.*

1140 A robust understanding of justification by grace enriches a Christian commitment to  
1141 gender justice. A Lutheran expression of the doctrine of justification underscores gender justice  
1142 as a concern of faith in three ways.<sup>43</sup>

1143 First, justification is wholly God’s work through Christ; we cannot justify ourselves.  
1144 Justification as God’s act challenges the self-centeredness of self-justification, of trying to put  
1145 ourselves above or before others, as with male privilege. From a Lutheran faith perspective, no  
1146 particular group is superior to another based on sex (biological) or gender. Because God redeems  
1147 us, we cannot rely on a belief that one group can justify themselves in the world or with God  
1148 because of their supposed superiority or “headship.” Sin and grace are great equalizers. All  
1149 Christians are sinful, and all Christians are equally dependent upon God’s grace.

1150 Second, justification frees us from bondage. Being freed in Christ involves being freed  
1151 from all that tries to replace Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives, including systems of patriarchy.  
1152 This reality changes our life with respect to issues of sex and gender. We are freed to recognize  
1153 God’s work in creation through human variation, human imagination, and human expression of  
1154 gender. We are able to see that humans are not created to be limited in our experience of being  
1155 human through a gender-based hierarchy.

1156 Third, justification gives Christians the freedom of a new perspective—to be more  
1157 concerned with what the neighbor needs and less concerned with following and enforcing  
1158 gender-based rules and assumptions. We are freed to see and support one another in all our  
1159 uniqueness. Justification helps us to see gender justice from the perspective of faith.

1160

1161 *20) The Lutheran understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, in which*  
1162 *the Word of God is connected with tangible, physical elements, grounds efforts to prevent the*  
1163 *harm that sexism and patriarchy cause to the bodies, minds, and spirits of human beings.*

1164 Lutheran theology can help reorient sexist and racist theology and practices that limit the  
1165 full participation of varied human bodies in the sacraments. According to the Lutheran  
1166 Confessions, when the material things of water, bread, and wine are combined with God’s Word,

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<sup>43</sup> See Mary J. Streufert, “Idolatry-Critical Justification and the Foreclosed Gendered Life,” in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology*, ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner, Church of Sweden Series 9 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 134-152.

1167 God is really present: “Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God’s  
1168 command and connected with God’s Word.”<sup>44</sup> When we feel the water of baptism and consume  
1169 the bread and wine of the eucharist, God is present to our diverse, individual bodies and in the  
1170 unity of the Church that is the body of Christ. Drawing on the Apostle Paul, Luther taught that  
1171 the Lord’s Supper unites us in one body: “[S]o that by this sacrament . . . and through this mutual  
1172 love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community.”<sup>45</sup>

1173 We must continue to embrace our unity and diversity so that we welcome and uplift  
1174 people of every sex (biological) and gender—indeed, every body—in our work together as the  
1175 body of Christ in the world. God’s love feeds the body of Christ so that it might live in love. The  
1176 sacramental promise that God is present in water, bread, and wine, along with the good news that  
1177 God became human, leads this church to treasure, hold, and advocate for the embodied lives of  
1178 all people.

1179  
1180 *21) The ELCA has identified sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation as the key*  
1181 *principles for creating and supporting justice.*<sup>46</sup> *This church commends these principles to create*  
1182 *and support neighbor justice, specifically gender justice for the neighbor. Social and religious*  
1183 *structures and institutions—including ideas, beliefs, religious teachings, laws, policies,*  
1184 *practices, and language—must be assessed and should be guided by these principles.*

1185 As Lutherans, we understand that God intends not only individuals, but also cultures and  
1186 governments, to develop in ways that enable all people to flourish. With other members of  
1187 society, we affirm the national ideal toward which people in the United States continually  
1188 strive—that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and  
1189 the pursuit of happiness. We also believe that all people have the responsibility to safeguard  
1190 these rights for others as well as themselves. Insofar as this ideal allows everyone to flourish, the  
1191 ELCA joins people of other religions and worldviews to advance a universal vision of an  
1192 equitable society in which all people participate fully.<sup>47</sup>

1193 Although we recognize that perfect worldly justice is not possible, this church holds that  
1194 efforts toward justice should stress the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and  
1195 participation. These principles guide us away from injustices against women and girls from a  
1196 variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences and toward justice for all those  
1197 affected by patriarchy and sexism.

1198 The principle of sufficiency inspires us to meet the basic needs (physical, emotional,  
1199 intellectual, social, and spiritual) of all women and those who depend on them. This means, for  
1200 example, that society must protect them from violence and provide them with equitable  
1201 opportunities in education and employment. The principle of sufficiency supports not only  
1202 passive respect, but also advocacy in matters of health care, immigration, violence, human  
1203 trafficking, and the workplace, for example.

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<sup>44</sup> “Small Catechism” in *The Book of Concord*, 359.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther, “A Treatise Concerning the Blessed Sacrament and Concerning the Brotherhoods,” cited in *A Compendium of Luther’s Theology*, ed. Hugh Kerr (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 176.

<sup>46</sup> These principles are evident throughout ELCA social teaching and policy. Examples include the social statements *Caring for Creation*; *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*; and *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*. Visit [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements)

<sup>47</sup> See *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991) and “Human Rights” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017), <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Human-Rights>.

1204 The principle of sustainability compels society to provide all generations of women with  
1205 the means toward an acceptable quality of life. This applies to both the emotional and the  
1206 material aspects of life. Both church and society should evaluate how their structures ensure—or  
1207 fail to ensure—that all people have livelihoods and the means for well-being.

1208 The principle of solidarity commits society to see and experience our own well-being as  
1209 connected to the well-being of others and their communities. It often involves people aligning  
1210 themselves with others who have different experiences. Solidarity encompasses empathy and  
1211 respect for the lived experience of women and girls; it encourages people not only to share in  
1212 their suffering but also to participate in their liberation.

1213 The principle of participation urges us to structure our communities so that women  
1214 participate equitably in the personal, local, and political decisions affecting their lives. All people  
1215 need to participate in the structures that affect their lives and the decisions that affect their  
1216 communities. No one's access to decision-making should be limited by sex or gender.

1217

1218 *22) The ELCA recognizes that some progress has been made to address patriarchy and sexism*  
1219 *and to reduce their effects; however, more effort is required. We believe that this church,*  
1220 *together with many other partners, can identify and challenge the complexities of patriarchy and*  
1221 *sexism and advance equity. Gender-based equity happens through beliefs and ideas that are*  
1222 *gender just and through laws, policies, and practices that support an equitable common good—*  
1223 *abundant life for all.*

1224 Working together, people from many walks of life have brought about change in the  
1225 North American context, diluting the power of patriarchy and sexism. Positive social and  
1226 religious views about gender have influenced laws and policies that advance women's rights;  
1227 conversely, changes in laws have positively influenced social and religious views. This nation  
1228 and this church have seen and supported many positive changes in attitudes and laws that have  
1229 helped women and girls to thrive, but more work remains to be done to support neighbor justice.

1230 Individuals and groups must challenge harmful social ideas and practices, reject sexist  
1231 religious beliefs, and work to change laws, policies, and practices that justify and reinforce  
1232 patriarchy. When enough people—especially people of faith—work, pray, stand, and struggle  
1233 together, they can transform attitudes, beliefs, laws, policies, and practices so that all people of  
1234 all sexes and genders enjoy God's vision of abundant life.

1235

1236

#### **IV. Response:**

1237 **The ELCA is called to new commitments and action as a church.**

1238

1239 *23) Propelled by these theological convictions and the robust resources of the Lutheran heritage,*  
1240 *this church responds to God's call to justice with the following commitments to promote and*  
1241 *support action toward a more equitable life together in Christ.*

1242 This section draws out the implications of this statement's convictions, analysis and resources in  
1243 our tradition. It sets forth this church's commitments to reshape beliefs, attitudes, policies, and  
1244 practices. Inevitably, meeting such commitments draws upon judgments of reason in discerning  
1245 what exactly must be done, when it must be done, and how. The process may involve difficult  
1246 conversations and unforeseen challenges calling for both determination and patience. The  
1247 particulars may well be subject to correction and further deliberation. This church, however,

1248 views the following commitments as a signal that our life together in Christ can be renewed in  
1249 ways that promote and support greater equity and justice.

1250  
1251 *24) This church recognizes that the Body of Christ is called to honor and support women and*  
1252 *girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences in ways more consistent*  
1253 *with life-giving theology and faith practices. As a church, we commit ourselves to celebrating*  
1254 *and affirming the gifts and insights that women and girls bring to every expression and*  
1255 *dimension of this church.*

1256 Over the centuries, women have carried immense responsibility in serving the church  
1257 despite being denied ministerial authority. They have served through religious education, music,  
1258 elder care, parish nursing, and bible study. They have pursued their vocations in myriad ways  
1259 that support the growth of the gospel and the life of their local congregations. The Lutheran  
1260 movement, including the ELCA, has only begun to recognize how we have failed to honor the  
1261 full range of Spirit-given gifts that have equipped women and girls to serve.

1262 The fundamental commitment needed, then, is not to a particular program, practice, or  
1263 process. Rather, we are called to repentance that reorients perspectives and actions, and we  
1264 commit to encouraging, celebrating, and affirming the full range of gifts prepared by the Spirit  
1265 for use in every expression and dimension of this church.

1266  
1267 **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America specifically commits to:**

1268  
1269 *25) Promote the practice and use of scriptural translation and interpretation that acknowledge*  
1270 *the contexts in which the Scriptures were written and reject the misuse of Scripture that has*  
1271 *supported sexist attitudes and patriarchal structures.*

1272 Drawing deeply upon our Lutheran heritage, the ELCA promotes an understanding of  
1273 Scripture that both honors its Word-centered purpose and acknowledges its historical sources and  
1274 contexts. This church listens to God's Word speaking through the Scripture to sustain Christian  
1275 faith and empower the community for service and justice in the world.

1276 Mindful of how the Christian Scriptures, through translation and interpretation, have been  
1277 misused to support patriarchal structures and sexist attitudes, this church will promote translation  
1278 and scriptural interpretation sensitive to the concerns of this statement.<sup>48</sup> Scriptural texts in which  
1279 females are degraded, terrorized, debased, dominated, or valued less than males should be  
1280 interpreted in light of God's resolve for abundant life through Christ.

1281  
1282 *26) Promote theological reflection that responds to the gender-based needs of the neighbor.*  
1283 *Teachers and theologians need to be honest about how church teachings have been misused to*  
1284 *support patriarchy and sexism. More importantly, this church calls upon its teachers and*  
1285 *theologians to work toward worthier expressions of the historic faith that honor God's desire for*  
1286 *all people to thrive.*

1287 This church affirms the gifts of the Lutheran Christian tradition—the faithful witness of  
1288 the Confessions, the power of the preached Word, and the reflection of theologians. At the same  
1289 time, in recent decades this church has begun to recognize how these treasured gifts have  
1290 sometimes been misused. Even while proclaiming the life-giving Gospel and the call for service  
1291 and justice, preachers and theologians often have omitted or suppressed the stories, reflections,

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<sup>48</sup> The many different translations of the Scriptures from their original languages are not of equal accuracy or value.



1292 and experiences of women and girls. For some, this suppression has contributed to a crisis of  
1293 faith.

1294 The commitment to articulate and proclaim the Christian faith in a more inclusive manner  
1295 calls for renewed efforts from preachers, teachers, and theologians. It means preaching and  
1296 writing that make full use of stories and insights from the lives of women and girls with a variety  
1297 of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences. It involves teaching and preaching about  
1298 justification, and a theology of the cross that recognizes how the motifs of Christlikeness and  
1299 suffering have been used harmfully. It entails teaching and research that reflect transformative  
1300 understandings, with special concern around key doctrines such as Christology and creation.

1301  
1302 *27) Use inclusive language (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and expansive language*  
1303 *(other than human) for God. This church is committed to the deepest Christian understanding of*  
1304 *the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining and speaking about*  
1305 *God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God's self-revelation and*  
1306 *mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational*  
1307 *materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language. This practice follows the*  
1308 *scriptural witness that God transcends human categories. Therefore, as in the Scriptures,*  
1309 *metaphors for and images of God should be drawn frequently from the lives of people of all*  
1310 *identities and experiences and gleaned from nature in all its diversity. Employing inclusive and*  
1311 *expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the God*  
1312 *of beauty and love who reveals God's self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.*

1313 Words are powerful because they shape how humans relate to one another. For this  
1314 reason, the ELCA has long urged **inclusive language** regarding human beings in both worship  
1315 and everyday use.<sup>49</sup> This statement reinforces that commitment. This church urges renewed  
1316 efforts to move us together from the habits of predominantly male-oriented wording to language  
1317 that embraces all people.

1318 Words about God carry even greater substance and subconscious meaning because they  
1319 are religious symbols. The God revealed in Christ defies *all* human comprehension and speech.  
1320 Still, humans must use words and images to pray and praise. The words that are used carry  
1321 historical depth and communal power and have meaning for an individual's self-understanding  
1322 and relationships.

1323 Moving beyond exclusive language and imagery presents a complex challenge, both  
1324 personally and communally. Changing or expanding Christian symbolism may be both unsettling  
1325 and life-giving. For instance, paternal or maternal references to God may be liberating for some  
1326 people but deeply painful for others. Despite the complexity, this church urges Christians to  
1327 work together to confront the problem of exclusive language and imagery because these  
1328 contribute significantly to patriarchal religious beliefs and practices.

1329 The formulation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the center the conversation. Many  
1330 Christians think this is the only correct way to speak of God, which reinforces exclusively  
1331 masculine associations. Others think that the traditional Trinitarian formulation should be  
1332 changed or discarded because it promotes a faulty understanding of God as essentially male.

1333 The ELCA affirms the creedal witness to the mystery, relations, and actions of the three  
1334 persons of the Trinity. At the same time, this church holds that exclusive use of a male-oriented  
1335 formula to refer to God is problematic. The use of expansive language for God reflects  
1336 faithfulness to God's self-revelation in the Scriptures and in human experience.

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<sup>49</sup> *ELCA Style Guide* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2014), 48.

1337 In our life together, we call upon leaders and members to enlarge the dialogue about and  
1338 practice of inclusive and expansive language and images for God. It is vital to explore the often-  
1339 neglected variety of symbols for God recorded in the Scriptures, and to plumb the historical  
1340 insights found in theology and religious art. In this spirit, this statement urges the continued  
1341 exploration and development of expansive liturgies, hymnody, and worship resources.

1342  
1343 *28) Develop and support more extensive policies and practices within the ELCA that promote*  
1344 *equitable authority and leadership within this church in all its expressions. In many instances*  
1345 *this requires promoting the leadership of women, with special concern for women of color. In*  
1346 *other cases, this means promoting the participation of men in more varied roles, including those*  
1347 *traditionally seen as “women’s work.”*

1348 In the 1970s, the three predecessor churches of the ELCA made independent decisions to  
1349 ordain women for the public ministry of Word and Sacrament.<sup>50</sup> While multiple viewpoints were  
1350 argued, these churches concluded that the Scriptures present a mixed record regarding ordination  
1351 and that nothing definitive precluded women from serving in this office.

1352 Since then, the experience of this church has shown those decisions to be God-pleasing,  
1353 consistent with the words of the prophet Joel (Joel 2) and embodied in the Pentecost story of  
1354 Acts in which the Spirit falls upon all without respect to age, gender, nationality, or ability (Acts  
1355 2). Women serving in lay leadership, ministries of Word and Sacrament, and ministries of Word  
1356 and Service have borne powerful witness to the Gospel and enlivened this church’s ministry.  
1357 However, individual journeys have been difficult for many and the communal journey since  
1358 1970 has been agonizingly slow.

1359 In light of this experience, this church gives thanks, rejoices, and remains committed to  
1360 developing and supporting additional policies and practices that promote women’s authority and  
1361 leadership within the ELCA, both rostered and lay. Given the continual struggles of women of  
1362 color for acceptance, equity, and leadership, this church’s commitments with them require  
1363 special attention.<sup>51</sup>

1364 This commitment to confront continuing sexism and promote equitable authority and  
1365 leadership of women belongs to the entire church. It also includes encouraging men to seek more  
1366 varied roles in lay service and on the roster of Word and Service.

1367 The commitment speaks to, but is not limited to, call committees, boards, and councils. It  
1368 requires attention to formal and informal mentoring and succession planning. It requires attention  
1369 to practices in seminaries, colleges and universities, social ministry organizations, preschools and  
1370 grade schools, and youth ministries. Together we can open ourselves joyfully to the Spirit, who  
1371 clearly has used the gifts of female leadership to enhance and empower her work.

1372  
1373 *29) Promote changes that are economically just, including equitable pay and benefits, for*  
1374 *women in all ELCA institutions and organizations, with special attention to the situations of*  
1375 *people affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.*

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<sup>50</sup> The Lutheran Church in America in 1970, the American Lutheran Church in 1972, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in 1976.

<sup>51</sup>See “45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), [download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/45th\\_Anniversary\\_of\\_the\\_Ordination\\_Women\\_Ordained\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/45th_Anniversary_of_the_Ordination_Women_Ordained_Full_Report.pdf).

1376 In support of women’s authority and leadership, this church must continue to seek new  
1377 ways to redress economic injustice. As of this writing,<sup>52</sup> rostered women of the ELCA average  
1378 higher pay than ordained women nationally but their compensation remains inequitable  
1379 compared to that of men within the ELCA. The ELCA is called to renew efforts to support  
1380 equitable benefits and pay across our church. These should include particular attention to women  
1381 affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

1382 These efforts should not overlook the economic concerns of lay women serving in church  
1383 callings, including those serving in less-recognized roles such as office administrators, preschool  
1384 teachers, or in ministries of hospitality. The various organizations and institutions of this church  
1385 need to review their compensation, including insurance and other benefits.

1386 Finally, this church needs to offer greater support for women’s ministry and leadership  
1387 in policies related to pregnancy, parental leave, and breastfeeding. Improved arrangements for  
1388 ELCA rostered leaders and for employees of ELCA-related organizations and institutions should  
1389 support these leaders and demonstrate this church’s commitment to family.

1390  
1391 *30) Seek and encourage faithful dialogue, discernment, and, when possible, joint action on*  
1392 *issues of patriarchy and sexism with other members of the body of Christ and with partners of*  
1393 *other religions and worldviews. As a member of a global communion, the ELCA affirms the*  
1394 *Lutheran World Federation’s “Gender Justice Policy.”*

1395 ([https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS\\_Gender\\_Justice.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf))

1396 Governed by the framework of this statement, we in this church acknowledge our  
1397 responsibility to continue to address our own actions, attitudes, policies, and practices as  
1398 members of the body of Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit is leading faithful Christians, as  
1399 well as people of diverse religions and worldviews, into deeper discernment about questions of  
1400 patriarchy and sexism.

1401 In our own exploration of these issues, we seek whenever possible to engage our  
1402 Christian siblings in mutual discernment and common action, acknowledging our own  
1403 complicity in patriarchy and sexism. This approach is apparent in the ELCA’s “A Declaration of  
1404 Ecumenical Commitment”: “The first word, which the Church speaks ecumenically, may well be  
1405 a word of self-criticism, a word against itself, because we are called to be seekers of a truth that  
1406 is larger than all of us and that condemns our parochialism, imperialism, and self-  
1407 preoccupation.”<sup>53</sup> Dialogue, while necessary and mutual, begins through self-examination.

1408 Given the diverse but strongly held perspectives in society and throughout Christ’s  
1409 church, conversations about patriarchy and sexism can be challenging as well as promising.  
1410 ELCA leaders and members encounter commitments and perspectives among neighbors of other  
1411 religions and worldviews that are quite different from those endorsed by this statement. In our  
1412 commitment to engage with and accompany our neighbors, we need to be clear about ELCA  
1413 social teaching but also listen carefully to different ideas. This is part of how we seek mutual  
1414 understanding and pursue neighbor justice. The goal is to join in honest conversation and to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> The policy statement continues: “If it can speak such a word of self-criticism, the Church will be free to reject a triumphalist and magisterial understanding of itself and cultivate instead an understanding of itself as a community of mission and witness that seeks to be serviceable to the in-breaking of the reign of God.” See “A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The\\_Vision\\_Of\\_The\\_ELCA.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Vision_Of_The_ELCA.pdf)).

1415 challenge each other to greater justice while accompanying women and girls in their own  
1416 contexts.

1417 The ELCA is grateful for the faithful and courageous witness of our global communion,  
1418 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). While this ELCA social statement is situated in the  
1419 diverse cultural context of the United States, we recognize the biblical rationale, principles, and  
1420 methodology of the LWF “Gender Justice Policy” as a global benchmark toward conversation  
1421 and common practice. In a spirit of “mutual conversation and consolation,”<sup>54</sup> the ELCA will  
1422 continue to accompany and to be accompanied in implementing that policy within the global  
1423 Lutheran community. Similar efforts by the World Council of Churches, supported by local and  
1424 regional councils, also encourage us in our collective task.

1425 We invite ecumenical partners, especially full communion partners, to work with us for  
1426 gender justice in church and society. The fundamental biblical commitment to justice should  
1427 undergird and guide our common attention to the problems caused by patriarchy and sexism,  
1428 even when we have different ideas about how to remedy these problems. In those areas where we  
1429 are not of one mind in our discernment, we will continue to walk together in the bond of  
1430 Christian unity, seeking the Spirit’s leading.

1431 We also invite partners of other religions and worldviews, especially where we serve  
1432 together in coalition, to continue to collaborate with us whenever possible in seeking justice for  
1433 women and girls. That search is integral to the common good.

1434

1435

## V. Response:

1436

### **The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society.**

1437

1438 *31) This church teaches that the God who justifies expects all people to seek justice in earthly*  
1439 *relationships, structures, and systems. The ELCA calls for sustained and renewed efforts through*  
1440 *which women, girls, and gender non-conforming people experience greater equity and justice.*  
1441 *The following commitments express this church’s firm hope for renewed social relationships and*  
1442 *structures that benefit the common good.*

1443

1444 The Scriptures are clear that the God who justifies is the same God who insists that  
1445 “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). The  
1446 ELCA affirms that God’s Law, in its civil use, permeates and undergirds basic structures of  
1447 human society to support life and protect all people in a world that remains under the sway of  
1448 sin. God works through shared human endeavor and intends that all people work together to  
1449 deter evil and seek justice.

1449

1450 Lutheran Confessional teachings identify the primary structures of human society—the  
1451 church, family, civil authority, and economic arrangement—as God’s gifts. Justice is the measure  
1452 by which God’s Law guides and assesses these basic structures. Social structures and institutions  
1453 that fail to do justice are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created them. They must be  
1454 challenged and held accountable; this is a matter of great urgency because human life depends  
1455 upon them.

1455

1456 In seeking the well-being of the human community, the Lutheran tradition places a strong  
1457 reliance upon human reason and knowledge tested and exercised through the sciences and social  
1458 analysis. Although imperfect, social movements—enlivened by the insights of human reason and

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<sup>54</sup>[2] “Smalcald Articles,” *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 319.

1458 knowledge—can be expressions of God’s work through the Law to bring about greater justice  
1459 and social liberation. The women’s movement, broadly understood, is one of these.

1460 In identifying the following aspects of society that require engagement, this church does  
1461 not presume to have quick or easy solutions for the deeply rooted, intertwined, and complex  
1462 problems that permeate earthly systems and structures. Time, study, effort, and discernment are  
1463 required. Nevertheless, it is both a clear biblical teaching and a matter of neighbor justice that  
1464 God’s people hold governing authorities and social structures accountable to their purpose,  
1465 ensuring greater equity and justice for all.<sup>55</sup> These commitments to advocate for and support  
1466 social renewal express this church’s firm trust that God works to create improved social  
1467 relations.

1468

1469 **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to:**

1470

1471 *32) Advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather*  
1472 *than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them. Women, girls and people who*  
1473 *identify as non-binary must not be deprived of their human or civil rights. (See the ELCA’s*  
1474 *social message “Human Rights,” [www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)*

1475 ELCA social teaching supports human rights for all people, regardless of their sex  
1476 (biological), gender, or sexuality. This stance is rooted in respect and welcome for all people as  
1477 created in the image of God, and evident in the ELCA’s longstanding commitment to protecting  
1478 civil and human rights. While members may hold differing views on matters related to sexual  
1479 orientation or gender identity,<sup>56</sup> this church is nevertheless united in opposing discrimination,  
1480 objectification, abuse, or control of the bodies of women, girls, or individuals who identify as  
1481 **genderqueer**.<sup>57</sup> The ELCA’s commitment to civil and political rights helps to orient the changes  
1482 and challenges addressed in the following commitments. Minimal steps include developing and  
1483 enforcing laws, policies, and practices that do not deprive any people of their human or civil  
1484 rights.

1485

1486 *33) Advocate for and support the eradication of gender-based violence within the church and*  
1487 *more broadly in society by addressing both the systemic aspects of such violence and the*  
1488 *personal responsibility of those who perpetrate harm. (See the ELCA’s social messages*  
1489 *“Gender-based Violence” and “Commercial Sexual Exploitation,”*  
1490 *[www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)*

1491 All people deserve safety and protection from violence, along with due process and  
1492 support when violence is experienced. Although anyone may experience gender-based violence,  
1493 the overwhelming number of attacks target women, girls, and individuals who identify as  
1494 genderqueer. Such violence often occurs in domestic settings, yet gender-based violence includes

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<sup>55</sup> *Church in Society*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> See *Human Sexuality*, 19, and “Gender Identity Discrimination” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> This statement uses terms regarding sex, gender, and sexuality that are preferred in 2019. Preferences will likely change in the future. See the *GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 10th ed., <http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD-Media-Reference-Guide-Tenth-Edition.pdf>

1495 any physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, or other personal harm inflicted on  
1496 someone for reasons of gender, regardless of the setting.<sup>58</sup>

1497 Although individuals are ultimately responsible for their actions, gender-based violence  
1498 is rooted in systemic sin. A patriarchal social system affirms, sometimes implicitly, that women  
1499 and girls should be controlled or subordinated. In this way, it underwrites, justifies, or at least  
1500 permits acts of violence, whether by individuals or communities. Patriarchy, even when  
1501 seemingly harmless or unrecognized, often reinforces the conditions, attitudes, and values that  
1502 undergird harmful action.

1503 The wide scope of theological, pastoral, and societal matters related to gender-based  
1504 violence is addressed in the ELCA's social message "Gender-based Violence."<sup>59</sup> In it, this  
1505 church calls upon itself *and* upon society to resist and change harmful attitudes, beliefs, and  
1506 systems. This social statement affirms the analysis, insights, and commitments expressed there.  
1507

1508 *34) Advocate for and support medical research, health care delivery, and access to equitable*  
1509 *and affordable health care services, including reproductive health care, that honor how bodies*  
1510 *differ and eliminate discrimination due to sex (biological), gender, or sexual orientation. (See*  
1511 *the ELCA social statements Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor and Abortion,*  
1512 [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).)

1513 The ELCA teaches that a just society provides equitable access to health care for all.<sup>60</sup>  
1514 Health is a shared endeavor, requiring both personal responsibility and social commitment.  
1515 "Health care is the kind of good most appropriately given on the basis of need."<sup>61</sup>

1516 The U.S. medical system is widely recognized as a global leader in research, prevention,  
1517 and treatment. As a church, we are grateful for amazing medical advancements. At the same  
1518 time, U.S. health care has carried a bias against women and girls in its practice and delivery.

1519 This church gives thanks for those who have drawn attention to these problems. We urge  
1520 everyone in medical research and health care delivery to recognize that diverse bodies have  
1521 differing needs. We look for further advancement in medical research and the health care system,  
1522 both rural and urban, that eliminate discrimination based on sex and gender, economic resources,  
1523 ability, ethnicity, or race.

1524 This statement affirms previous ELCA teaching on reproductive health care. Such care is  
1525 to be provided according to need in all cases,<sup>62</sup> and this church opposes any effort to roll back  
1526 that delivery. While questions about how best to organize and finance mechanisms of care leave  
1527 room for legitimate debate, the mandate for equitable access to reproductive health care remains.

1528 The ELCA social statement *Abortion* ([www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements)) addresses in a  
1529 nuanced way this critical, complex, and controversial aspect of reproductive health care. It  
1530 teaches that the life and decisions of someone who is pregnant, as well as the developing life in a  
1531 womb, must be respected and protected through a complex assessment of moral and social  
1532 factors.

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<sup>58</sup>"Gender-based Violence" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), 2, 6-7, and "Foundational documentation for a social message on Gender-based Violence" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2003), 18.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

1533 On that basis, this church teaches that abortion ought to be an option of last resort for  
1534 pregnant persons and the people in their lives. At the same time, ELCA teaching opposes laws  
1535 that deny access to safe and affordable abortions. It urges efforts to reduce the conditions that  
1536 encourage many to turn to abortion as the response to unintended pregnancy.<sup>63</sup>

1537  
1538 *35) Advocate for and support economic policies, regulations, and practices that enhance equity*  
1539 *and equality for women and girls, with special concern for raising up women and girls who*  
1540 *experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA’s social statement Sufficient,*  
1541 *Sustainable Livelihood for All, [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).)*

1542 Through human decisions and actions, God intends economic arrangements to support  
1543 human thriving. This church’s benchmark on economic arrangements is that they should provide  
1544 “sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all.”<sup>64</sup>

1545 The U.S. economic system has made notable movement in this direction for women over  
1546 the last 40 years. However, economic inequality between men and women remains stark,  
1547 especially when it overlaps or intersects with social identities. This is evident not only in pay  
1548 discrepancy but also in other forms of compensation. Such economic inequalities  
1549 disproportionately harms women and their families.

1550 This church expects workers to be paid equitably for similar work. There should be no  
1551 discrepancies in benefits nor in access to capital for business or investment. There should be no  
1552 discrepancies in access to Social Security or pensions. Intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity,  
1553 and ability should not worsen the disparities.

1554 There are various strategies to correct these systemic problems. Some stress regulations  
1555 aimed at equity whereas others emphasize market freedom. The primary criteria should be what  
1556 provides sufficient, sustainable livelihood, because the lives of providers and their dependents  
1557 are at stake.

1558  
1559 *36) Advocate for and support multifaceted understandings of social and economic roles so that*  
1560 *neither our human traits (such as courage or compassion) nor our callings (such as business*  
1561 *leader or stay-at-home parent) are dictated by our sex (biological) and gender. Encourage and*  
1562 *empower all people to use their gifts for the sake of the common good, whether at home, at work,*  
1563 *or in the public sphere.*

1564 Some people and communities understand gender-assigned roles and characteristics to be  
1565 largely fixed. These roles, often connected to the teaching of complementarity, are considered to  
1566 be immutably defined by God or nature. The historical evidence demonstrates that many of the  
1567 injustices and power inequities visited upon women have followed from that teaching. However,  
1568 this church holds that roles within social structures are intended for the sake of human well-being  
1569 and are provisional rather than fixed.

1570 As social beings, we humans need social structures and guidance for the roles we live  
1571 out. Social structures and roles are not solely social constructions; some aspects of biology  
1572 influence some behavioral tendencies. Yet, the admission of women into professions like law or  
1573 the military in recent decades, and their success in those fields, demonstrate that gender-assigned

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<sup>63</sup> *Abortion* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 4-10.

<sup>64</sup> *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999), 3.

1574 roles are not immutable as once believed.<sup>65</sup> Social roles and structures require ongoing  
1575 evaluation in light of God’s intent that human community should flourish.<sup>66</sup>

1576 This church celebrates when women find their places of responsibility, whether as heads  
1577 of a corporation or full-time homemakers. Either choice illustrates the calling to contribute to  
1578 society’s good. Men should explore similar variety in the roles they seek. Because there are  
1579 many phases in each person’s life journey, we also honor roles that are not compensated, such as  
1580 retirement or volunteerism. The aim is for individuals in community to seek the most life-giving  
1581 roles within the structures of church, family, work, or civil society.

1582 Toward this end, the ELCA urges that society’s laws, policies, and practices foster  
1583 diversity and flexibility so that all may contribute their gifts to society, regardless of their gender.  
1584 U.S. courts and legislatures today generally support women’s vocations outside the home. In  
1585 addition, this society needs laws and policies that will eliminate hidden discrimination, including  
1586 when one becomes pregnant.

1587  
1588 *37) Advocate for and support resources for families of various configurations and the*  
1589 *communities in which they live. Empower parents and all who raise or care for children or other*  
1590 *family members to nurture, protect, and provide for their households in ways that do not*  
1591 *reinforce gender-based stereotypes. In particular, advocate for institutional changes that support*  
1592 *and encourage men and boys to participate in all family roles associated with the home,*  
1593 *caregiving, parenting, and nurturing.*

1594 This church continues to affirm the goodness of marriage and family but also recognizes  
1595 that patriarchy has affected these relationships in harmful ways. The family is “an indispensable  
1596 social institution because of its role in establishing conditions of trust and protection of the  
1597 vulnerable.”<sup>67</sup> We teach that families are formed in various configurations; the primary concern  
1598 is how well they meet their intended purpose of helping all family members flourish.

1599 Historically, in this society men have assumed the “headship” of their households and  
1600 women have been expected to be subordinate and to fulfill roles with lower social status, such as  
1601 nurturing and caring for others. In justification, Christians in the past, and many today, cite the  
1602 so-called “Household Codes” (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). Indeed, some point to  
1603 gender-based rules presented as a form of works righteousness (1 Timothy 2:15).<sup>68</sup>

1604 By contrast, this church holds that God intends the leadership of families to be shared in  
1605 full and equitable partnerships, which can be arranged in various ways. Social science research  
1606 indicates that families and households benefit most when roles are adjusted according to the  
1607 personalities and circumstances involved rather than fixed according to gender, insisting on the  
1608 male as sole head of the house.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> In 1872 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the right to practice law is not one of the privileges and immunities protected by the U.S. Constitution. Siding with the majority, Justice Joseph P. Bradley argued that “the civil law, as well as nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective spheres and destinies of man and woman. . . . The Constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood.” *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 83 U.S. 130, 141 (1872) (Bradley, J., concurring).

<sup>66</sup> *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009), 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 and following.

<sup>68</sup> Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*. These social stipulations were borrowed from the pagan social order of the first century and adapted by some New Testament writers. Despite their pagan origin, they have been treated as matters of revelation because they appear in the Scriptures.

<sup>69</sup> Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers, in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 285ff.



1609           Such adjustments empower those who raise or care for children to share authority and  
1610 household roles, which allows everyone to thrive. Flexibility permits shared responsibility for all  
1611 caring relationships in a household, from infant care to elder care. This necessarily means  
1612 balancing demands of work and income, individual strengths and interests, and the particular  
1613 needs of the family or household.

1614           Society’s economic and social arrangements should provide generously in support of  
1615 families. For instance, the one who gives birth needs adequate paid leave, but so do other  
1616 caregivers. Every caregiver needs the opportunity to bond with a newborn and, in relevant cases,  
1617 to support a partner’s recovery from labor and delivery. U.S. society must find ways to increase  
1618 paid family leave for parents and primary caregivers and to strengthen support for child care.  
1619 Those returning to work after raising children also need profession-specific support for  
1620 reentering the work force.

1621  
1622 *38) Advocate for and support legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for*  
1623 *migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially those who experience*  
1624 *intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA’s social message “Immigration,”*  
1625 *[www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).)*

1626           This statement affirms previous ELCA teaching and policy that stress fairness and  
1627 generosity in responding to newcomers in the United States. The ELCA’s commitment to U.S.  
1628 legal and policy reform includes several social-policy resolutions anchored by compassion,  
1629 justice, and wisdom.<sup>70</sup> Those resolutions prioritize addressing the root causes of mass migration,  
1630 the unification of families, and just, humane enforcement.

1631           Migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers often suffer more when they are  
1632 women, girls, or **gender non-conforming** people. At every point in their journey, and even when  
1633 living and working in the U.S., they are especially vulnerable to degradation, rape, and other  
1634 forms of violence. Their immigration status must not compromise their safety and well-being.  
1635 On the contrary, their status as sojourners in this society invokes biblical injunctions for special  
1636 care and concern (Leviticus 19:34).

1637  
1638 *39) Advocate for and support portrayals in entertainment, media, and advertising that do not*  
1639 *objectify or stereotype people but rather show all people as capable of the wide variety of human*  
1640 *characteristics and roles.*

1641           The power of entertainment and media to shape individual thought and cultural beliefs is  
1642 immense and often underestimated. This church expects that entertainment and media should  
1643 seek to be gender just. The gender-based stereotypes and sexist attitudes in film, print,  
1644 advertisements, and social media are many and require serious efforts for reform.

1645           The purpose of entertainment is to provide release and enjoyment, while art offers an  
1646 interpretation of human experience that probes our understanding. This church encourages  
1647 entertainment and media decision-makers to portray gender diversity and to show that  
1648 individuals are capable of a wide variety of human characteristics and status. Consumers are  
1649 encouraged to think critically about both the production and their own consumption of these

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<sup>70</sup> Since 2009, actions include: “Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Reform” (ELCA social policy resolution (SPR), 2008); “AMMPARO Strategy” (ELCA SPR, 2016); “Dream Act” (ELCA SPR, 2011); “Uniting American Families Act” (ELCA SPR, 2013); and “Welcoming and Advocating for Refugees” (ELCA SPR, 2016). These can be viewed at [ELCA.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society) .

1650 media. Those who raise or educate children and youth are especially encouraged to seek greater  
1651 media literacy.

1652  
1653 *40) Advocate for and support means for increasing women’s participation in local, state, and*  
1654 *national politics, with special attention to the proportionate advocacy and support needed by*  
1655 *those who face intersecting forms of oppression.*

1656 The Lutheran theological heritage teaches that God intends governing authorities to serve  
1657 the good of society. When women are underrepresented in this country’s political offices and  
1658 public leadership, the common good and the vocations of women are not fully served. This  
1659 church encourages change in social beliefs and attitudes about women that often inform their  
1660 exclusion from political life and public leadership. This church likewise calls for mentoring,  
1661 education, and equitable practices toward political leadership, and for services for families and  
1662 households that enable women to serve. Especially acute is the need to encourage and support  
1663 women of color and others in marginalized groups to serve in political and leadership roles at  
1664 local, state, and national levels.

1665

1666

**A Shared Challenge:  
Living in hope, we are called to action.**

1667

1668

1669 We of the ELCA acknowledge the inspiring and yet challenging vision expressed in the  
1670 rich convictions and significant commitments of this statement addressing justice for women and  
1671 girls. We recognize that this requires the difficult and critical work of confronting and  
1672 dismantling patriarchy, sexism, and male privilege. We accept this summons with confidence in  
1673 the triune God—revealed in the Scriptures and celebrated in Word and Sacrament—who  
1674 lovingly intends that all people flourish.

1675 We recognize as God’s gifts the society and the church of which we are part, even while  
1676 analysis reveals how patriarchy and sexism pervade our lives within them. We give thanks for  
1677 the social advances made in this society against systemic and personal harm. Yet we affirm this  
1678 statement’s convictions and commitments as a summons to seek even greater justice and equity  
1679 for all.

1680 We are grateful that God grants us in faith both the freedom and the obligation for  
1681 neighbor justice, a commitment to seek equity and equality for all. We celebrate the Holy Spirit’s  
1682 work in our church and pray she will empower us to live in hope and into action, because  
1683 through Jesus Christ we trust that God’s promises ultimately will prevail.

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## End Notes

The footnotes in this recommended, proposed statement will be converted to endnotes upon adoption by the Churchwide Assembly, per standard format in ELCA social teaching documents. They are left in footnote format at this point for easy reference.

### **Glossary** [note: examples will be removed in adopted text]

*Androcentric*: Male-centered, focused on men.

*Binary (Gender Binary)*: The concept that there are only two genders, man or women, which are inherently distinct and “opposite.”

*Complementary/Complementarity*: The belief that God gave men and women inherently different roles and purposes that complement each other to mutual benefit. Men’s roles have often related to leadership and decision-making; women’s roles have included obeying males and caring for others. These roles are informed by the structural dynamic of dominance (male) and submission (female). The imbalance of power in the relationship contributes to male privilege.

*Domestic violence*: See entry for “Gender-based violence.”

*Equality*: The idea that people have the same rights and should receive the same resources. Equality can refer to the equal worth of all people or to people having equal experiences of their rights and their potential in life.

*Equity*: Fair treatment of people according to their needs. The principle of equity takes into account that people exist on inherently uneven playing fields due to poverty, sexism, racism, etc. Because of these different contexts, individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do (such as having a choice of quality doctors, careers, neighborhoods, etc.). The goal of equity is to ensure each person receives what they need to flourish and is not disadvantaged.

*Ex. A simple example of equality in public restrooms would be having changing tables in all restrooms, because male caregivers may also need a space to change diapers. A simple example of equity in public restrooms would be putting more stalls in women’s restrooms in order to serve the specific needs women have.*

*Expansive language*: Language (or imagery) referring to God that is not limited to humanity or human categories: water, a rock, a hiding place, a mighty fortress, etc. See “inclusive language.”

*Gender*: Identities, roles, behaviors, and attributes that cultures, societies, and individuals shape, most often linked to femininity and masculinity. The most common gender identities are woman/girl and man/boy, but other identities exist. For more, see “gender non-conforming.”

*Gender identity*: How a person understands their gender; one’s internal sense of one’s gender.

*Gender justice:* Gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations for people of all genders to live into their individual callings. Gender justice is sought by eliminating power imbalances among people at individual and societal levels, as well as eliminating discrimination against women and people who do not adhere to stereotypes associated with men and women.

*Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer:* Words that people who do not identify as “men” or “women” use to describe their gender (not sexuality). Their gender identity and/or biological characteristics may not completely fit with the dominant and expected ways of acting as, or being, a man or woman or a boy or girl. Each term might be used differently by different people, as an umbrella term or as a specific label for their gender identity. This document uses all three terms in an effort to be inclusive. (Terminology will change over time. Readers are referred to contemporary communities for up-to-date language.) *For more, see “gender,” “intersex,” “transgender,” and “queer.”*

*Gender-based violence:* Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons, including but not limited to intimate partner violence and domestic violence. This can include such things as catcalling women or bullying boys who are not perceived as “man enough.” Perpetrators commit gender-based violence to assert power over someone.

*Genderqueer:* See “*Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer.*”

*Hierarchy:* A system in which groups are ranked and certain groups have power over other groups. Sometimes this power over others leads to more value being assigned to the group or individuals with dominance.

*Human trafficking:* Coercion, abduction, and/or imprisonment of people for forced labor, often of a sexual nature. This problem is pervasive around the world, including in the U.S. Also known as modern-day slavery.

*Inclusive language:* Language that includes all genders when referring to humanity or God, for instance, using *humans* or *humankind* to talk about humanity, rather than *man* or *mankind*. See “*expansive language.*”

*Intersecting, intersectionality:* Humans have multiple aspects to their identities, including gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, social class, etc. These aspects of human identities are tied to systemic privilege and oppression; gender is tied to sexism, ethnicity is tied to racism, etc. Intersectionality describes the ways different forms of discrimination and systemic oppression affect each other and shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. All human identities and all forms of privilege and oppression are made up of many intersections.

*Ex. A woman of African descent may have a Ph.D. and make a healthy salary, but she will still suffer from racism and sexism. However, she would experience that racism and sexism differently from how a man of African descent, a white woman,*

*or an impoverished person might experience them. The injustices she faces, therefore, may have solutions different from those for other people.*

*Intersex:* As described by the Intersex Society of North America, a term for a variety of conditions people are born with: physical characteristics, anatomy, and/or genes that vary from standards set by doctors' expectations for being "female" or "male." The term refers to the fact of biological variation among humans. Some people identify as intersex, rather than using the term solely to refer to a condition; others may also identify as gender non-conforming or a similar term.

*Justice:* Generally, justice refers to an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment, and reciprocity. This statement emphasizes the aspects of justice that include fair and equal treatment under the law, ending oppression based on power differences, and, as emphasized in the Bible, a right relationship with God and within community.

*Neighbor justice:* A term proposed in this social statement rooted in the biblical directive to "love your neighbor as yourself." This term expresses the idea that faith is active in love and love necessarily calls for justice in relationships and in the structures of society. Neighbor justice is meeting neighbors' needs across the globe and in our local communities.

*Non-binary:* See "Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer."

*Objectification:* Thinking of or portraying people as objects, erasing their humanity, emotions, and rights.

*Ex. Catcalling, advertisements that use sexualized images to sell merchandise, and stories in which female characters exist only as props for male characters.*

*Patriarchy:* A social system that enables men to have more power than, and power over, women and people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. A patriarchal social system is dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men's actions, voices, and authority. In various ways, this kind of social system operates to control women, girls, and people who do not fit society's predominant ideas of maleness and masculinity.

*Privilege:* This term refers to the relationships between groups of people in society, to the social advantage or special treatment of a group or persons in a group. This advantage is unearned and results from how a group's identity is perceived as "normal" or "better." Privilege is lived out on an individual and societal scale. Privilege is not something a person deliberately opts into or out of, nor is it experienced by everyone in the same ways.

*Ex. A man benefits from male privilege when his opinion is subconsciously valued more highly in a meeting, when he is paid more for equal work, or when he walks down a street without harassment or fear of sexual assault. A white person benefits from white privilege when they can shop without being followed or monitored by staff who think they may shoplift, or when the majority of heroes in textbooks and movies look like them. For a white male, the combination of white privilege and male privilege can work together. A*

*white man may have fewer risk factors for some stress-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes, while his complaints of pain are more likely to be taken seriously by his doctor. For more, see “intersectionality.”*

*Queer:* Umbrella term regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation, often used by individuals who identify as somehow “other” from society’s sexual, romantic, or gender norms. Although historically used in a derogatory manner, the term has since been reclaimed as a positive label by some members within that community.

*Rape culture:* An environment in which the objectification of and assault on human bodies, particularly in a sexual way, is normalized and tolerated. Rape culture primarily harms women and girls. Blaming rape victims for their assaults and maintaining a biased justice system are both parts of rape culture and how it is propagated.

*Reproductive health care:* Health services related to the reproductive system at all stages of life for all genders, including the menstrual cycle, fertility, and cancer.

*Sex (biological):* A scientific label assigned at birth that describes an individual’s reproductive organs and whether they have XX chromosomes (female) or XY chromosomes (male). People whose biology varies from standards set by doctors’ expectations of being “female” or “male” are typically called “intersex.” Biological sex characteristics and traits of people who are said to be female or male are also variable.

*Sexism:* Refers to what supports male privilege and reinforces prejudice and discrimination against women and girls due to their gender and against people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. Human actions and speech can be sexist, as can institutions, policies, and practices.

*Sexuality:* A complex individual and social concept. Individually, sexuality includes the romantic and/or sexual feelings and desires that a person experiences. A person’s sexuality is also influenced by the social and cultural forces in which they find themselves.

*Toxic masculinity:* Refers to forms of masculinity that emphasize aggression, power, and control and sometimes violent or unhealthy sexuality. It deemphasizes weakness, caring, and vulnerability. Masculinity itself is not harmful; however, it is described as toxic when these forms of masculinity cultivate harm to self, others, and society; toxic masculinity limits the humanity and compassion of men.

*Transgender:* Describes a person whose gender is different from the sex assigned or identified at birth. Some transgender individuals identify as men or as women; others don't identify with one of those words. Some people use this term to describe their identity; for others it serves as an umbrella term. Over time its meaning may change as language evolves. *See “gender non-conforming.”*

*White privilege:* *See “privilege.”*

1685 **Implementing resolutions for Proposed Social Statement**

1686 ***Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action***

1687 (CWA 2019.xx.xx)

1688

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1690 **Resolved:**

- 1691 1. To urge members, congregations, synods, churchwide ministries, social ministry  
1692 organizations, church-related institutions, ecumenical partners, and all people of good will  
1693 to be guided by this statement’s convictions and commitments to resist and dismantle  
1694 patriarchy and sexism, and to transform life in the church and in society;
- 1695 2. To call upon members of this church to pray, work, and advocate for justice for all those  
1696 affected by sexism and patriarchy and to draw upon this statement in forming their  
1697 judgments and actions in daily life;
- 1698 3. To encourage members to be guided by the ELCA social message on “Gender-based  
1699 Violence (2015) in taking action, such as urging their congregations to implement policies  
1700 and to become intentional sites of advocacy and support for local efforts that serve those  
1701 affected by such violence;
- 1702 4. To call upon all members of this church to reflect on how mass media (films, video  
1703 games, etc.) and social media distort sex, gender, and sexuality and to address this  
1704 problem in their own actions (especially their care for children);
- 1705 5. To call upon congregational leaders, rostered and lay, to encourage women and girls to  
1706 pursue leadership roles within congregations and in discernment toward rostered ministry;
- 1707 6. To encourage ELCA congregations to present positive gender roles in their educational  
1708 activities, preschools, and day care, and to urge youth-related ministries within this church  
1709 to adopt positive modeling of gender equity in all leadership, programs and educational  
1710 events;
- 1711 7. To urge congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization (CWO) to address  
1712 inequities (in pay, senior leadership, availability of second and third calls, etc.) for  
1713 rostered and lay women of various backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences;
- 1714 8. To call upon the Conference of Bishops, synods, and the churchwide organization to use  
1715 gender-inclusive and expansive language for God, and to direct the ELCA worship team  
1716 a) to use such language whenever it commissions, curates, or develops new liturgical and  
1717 related educational resources, and (b) to supplement existing resources toward that end.
- 1718 9. To direct the Mission Advancement unit of the CWO to collaborate with the Office of the  
1719 Bishop in creating a single page at ELCA.org where readers can access the existing  
1720 resources of the ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation related to the concerns of this  
1721 statement and to work to make those resources available in languages other than English;
- 1722 10. To call upon this church’s advocacy and related ministries, such as ELCA Advocacy and  
1723 ELCA World Hunger, to support and advocate for measures, policies, and laws consistent  
1724 with this social statement and to give sustained attention to its convictions and  
1725 commitments in the creation of programs and projects;
- 1726 11. To recognize past and present CWO efforts to address institutional sexism and foster  
1727 gender justice in this church, and to urge sustained devotion of resources, such as support  
1728 for the CWO’s Justice for Women program;
- 1729

- 1730 12. To commend the ongoing ministries of Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in  
1731 Mission, and to encourage participation in their work, especially as they address the  
1732 issues identified in this social statement;
- 1733 13. To call upon those engaged in publishing activities throughout the ELCA to continue and  
1734 extend their support for gender equity in ELCA resources and communications through  
1735 such dimensions as language, images, stories, themes, and representation of contributors;
- 1736 14. To urge faculty, staff, and administrators of ELCA-related colleges, universities, and  
1737 seminaries to renew their efforts to develop syllabi and best practices that affirm and  
1738 promote the gifts of women from varied identities and backgrounds;
- 1739 15. To call upon rostered and lay congregational leaders, synodical and CWO staff, social  
1740 ministry organizations, and faculty and staff at ELCA colleges, seminaries, and  
1741 universities to renew their efforts to welcome, care for, and support the lives and gifts of  
1742 LGBTQIA persons and to oppose discrimination against these persons so that they may  
1743 live into the promise of gender justice envisioned in this social statement;
- 1744 16. To call for the church in all its expressions and related agencies, organizations, and  
1745 institutions to embed and incorporate anti-sexism training and protocols in their ongoing  
1746 work;
- 1747 17. To call upon the Office of the Bishop, in collaboration with appropriate units in the  
1748 CWO, to establish and oversee processes for implementation of and accountability for  
1749 these resolutions and to report to the fall meeting of ELCA Church Council in 2021.