

VIOLENCE IN OUR WORLD

Issue Paper



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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Background

"We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America share with the Church of Jesus Christ in all times and in all places the calling to be peacemakers" ("For Peace in God's World" [ELCA, 1995], Introduction, pg. 1 [1]). To this end, the church is called to promote respect for human rights by teaching, speaking out, and supporting effective ways to monitor and comply with human rights codes. The ELCA, through its predecessor bodies, has a legacy of peacemaking and calls its members to dedicate themselves anew to pray and work for peace in God's world. The ELCA has consistently supported the work of the United Nations in the area of human rights and in recognizing the inherent dignity of each person.

"Earthly peace means the relationships among and within nations that are just, harmonious, and free from war" (ibid.). The social statement "For Peace in God's World" calls church members to dedicate themselves to work for peace in God's world. Because the culture of peace can underpin sustainable development, environmental protection, and the personal well-being of each person, the United Nations declared an International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. Manifesto 2000, written by Nobel Peace Prize laureates, began the program, calling for active nonviolence, rejecting violence in all its forms—physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and social—in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable, such as children and adolescents. [2]

Violence pervades all aspects of life in our world, and its presence is felt during times of war as well as during times when war is absent. On an international level, this paper addresses such issues as antipersonnel landmines and other weapons with indiscriminate effects, as well as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. At a domestic level, violence manifests itself in community violence, sexual exploitation,

and workplace violence.

ELCA Social Policy

Historically the Lutheran church—the ELCA and its predecessor church bodies—have been committed to the support of human rights and the struggle against injustice. In terms of global issues of human rights, the ELCA social statement “For Peace in God’s World” (pg. 14) and statements of the predecessor church bodies—“Peace, Justice, and Human Rights” (ALC, 1972) and “Human Rights: Doing Justice in God’s World” (LCA, 1978)—support the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights [3], calling for respect and dignity for each person. This effort calls the church to be a disturbing, reconciling, and deliberating presence in word and deed in order to create an environment conducive to peace (see footnote 1, pg. 1). This statement on peace develops the global perspective for individuals and our church body to join with others in searching for what makes for peace (see footnote 1, pg.1).

In terms of domestic issues of violence, the ELCA Church Council has also adopted three messages that pertain to aspects of this issue. The 1994 message on “Community Violence” [4] deals with such issues as proliferation of guns and the culture of violence. Depictions of violence in the media and mediation toward just and peaceful solutions to conflict are also addressed. The 1996 message on “Sexuality: Some Common Convictions” [5] describes misuses of sexuality, including pornography and sexuality in media and advertising. And in the 2001 message on “Commercial Sexual Exploitation,” [6] pornography and sex trafficking are examined, calling the church to look at corporations whose earnings come from making, selling, promoting, or profiting from the pornography industry. ELCA Churchwide Assembly actions have included other issues relating to violence.

Corporate Response

These issues address the variety of aspects of violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and social, both internationally and domestically. In order to counter the culture of violence that pervades the national culture and media in this country, all of society—including the corporate world—must find creative ways to work toward peace and nonviolence. Sometimes it is simple, such as a corporation having a policy not to display guns and ammunition in family friendly areas. Other times, especially when national security and weapons are involved, it is more complex. The call to corporations is to recognize their role in the problem and to work to become part of the solution.

Social Criteria Investment Screens

The social criteria investment screen on weapons [7], revised and approved by the Church Council in 2007, responds to this issue. The social criteria investment screen on gambling [8], revised and approved by Church Council in 2008, responds to this issue. The social criteria investment screen on pornography [9], revised and approved by Church Council in 2007, responds to this issue.

Resolution Guidelines for ELCA

1. We support requests to establish policies renouncing involvement in the production, sale, and use of antipersonnel landmines, cluster bombs, and other weapons with indiscriminate effects.
2. We support requests to establish policies renouncing involvement in the production, sale, and use of biological and chemical weapons.
3. We support reports describing involvement in the use of depleted uranium.
4. We support requests for reports describing involvement in the production of nuclear weapons.
5. We support reports concerning involvement in space-based weapons.
6. We support requests to establish policies to make arms sales open to public scrutiny and reduce the arms trade including reports on foreign sales of weapons-related products and services.
7. We support requests for formal written workplace anti-violence policies.
8. We support requests for reports on policies and procedures aimed at stemming gun violence.
9. We support requests to report involvement in the pornography industry and policies to reduce involvement.
10. We support requests to disclose policies aimed at stemming the production and sale of violent video media, including video games.
11. We support policies aimed to eliminate slavery.
12. We support policies aimed to halt commercial sexual exploitation.
13. We support reports on policies prohibiting the sexual exploitation of minors.
14. We support reports on policies to address the negative effects of gambling and programs to assist individuals who have a gambling addiction.

Resolution Guidelines for ELCA – General

We support practices of good governance, specifically:

- A company having an independent chair or independent lead director;
- Reports on policies and procedures for political contributions and expenditures (both direct and indirect) made with corporate funds;
- Reports on any portion of any dues or similar payments made to any tax exempt organization that is used for an expenditure or contribution which might be deemed political; and
- Guidelines or policies governing the company's political contributions and expenditures.

[1] <http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>

[2] http://www3.unesco.org/manifesto2000/uk/uk_manifeste.htm

[3] <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

[4] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Community_Violence_SM.pdf

[5] <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySM.pdf>

[6] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Commercial_Sexual_ExploitationSM.pdf

[7] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Military_Weapons_Screen.doc.docx

[8] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gambling_Screen.doc.docx

[9] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Pornography%20_Screen.docx