

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

1 **A Social Message on * ...**

2 **Gender-based Violence**

3 Gender-based¹ violence is an ancient sin that for thousands of years has harmed countless
4 women, children and men. It is a sin that Christians need to recognize, understand and confront,
5 for our religious history also bears its stain. The following story from II Samuel 13 is a case in
6 point. (*As a matter of self care, survivors may wish to skip Tamar's story or the side bar boxes*
7 *that illustrate gender-based violence.*)

8 **Tamar's story: power and sexual violence**

Read II Samuel 13 (partial passage here)

¹⁹But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.²⁰Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house.

²¹When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn.

Tamar was King David's daughter. Her half-brother Amnon, King David's first-born son, raped her after he tricked her into his house. Then he threw her out on her own.

No one listened to Tamar. Amnon ignored her pleas not to rape her and not to cast her out. She courageously begged Amnon to follow Israel's laws and not sexually attack her. She tried to protect herself but could not.

Absalom, Tamar's brother, told her to be silent about Amnon raping her. Two years later, he killed Amnon.

King David did nothing. Although David was angry when he found out what Amnon had done, he protected Amnon because he wanted him to be the next king. He had the means to hold Amnon accountable and to care for Tamar. Instead, he was silent; he did not seek justice for her or become her ally.

Those who could have intervened on her behalf did not. *They* made her into "a desolate woman." (See II Samuel 13:1-33.) Tamar was silenced and

34

35 isolated. She alone lamented what others had done to her.

36

37 David and others completely failed Tamar. She is not mentioned again in Scripture. Although
38 God loved Tamar, she suffered from human violence in this broken and sinful world.

* The ELCA Church Council adopted this social message along with foundational documentation that goes deeper into explanation and analysis. Readers are encouraged to use that document as a supplemental resource. It can be found at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages>, select "gender-based violence."

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

39 God also loved David. God sent prophets to confront him because his leadership often created a
40 web of deceit, violence and silence. If only David, God’s anointed king of Israel, had supported
41 Tamar and been her ally in this web of power and violence! Tamar suffered from gender-based
42 violence, and the consequences of that violence reverberated through Israel as a community.

43
44 God loved Israel, too. God’s steadfast mercy endured their failures, but out of that same love,
45 God continually confronted them and called them to do good for all people, especially people
46 who are harmed, like Tamar. The story of Tamar, Amnon, Absalom and David challenges us
47 today as a call to God’s people in Christ to respond to gender-based violence.

48
49 People continue to be harmed. Gender-based violence is a global evil that marks millions of
50 lives. As a church of Jesus Christ, we deplore this suffering and we confess our collective and
51 individual complicities in this violence in both church and society. The complex factors that
52 contribute to the prevalence of this sin are deeply woven into society and into individual lives.

53
54 As a member of Christ’s body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) shares in
55 the brokenness and judgment brought on by gender-based violence. This church’s members are
56 survivors, perpetrators and bystanders. Like Amnon, we have violated others. Like David, we
57 have protected perpetrators. Like Absalom, we
58 have silenced survivors. Like all of them, we
59 often have created a web of isolation, shame
60 and desolation.

61
62 We also proclaim, however, that God loves us
63 and seeks to restore and heal us through the
64 power of the Holy Spirit. Like Tamar, this
65 church in this message is speaking against
66 gender-based violence. This church, which like
67 King David has neglected to act in the past, is
68 also beloved by God, inspired by the Spirit and
69 called to confront this problem.

70
71 Adopted by the ELCA Church Council, this
72 social message, with its foundational
73 documentation, is one way to express that call.*
74 This church commits itself to provide care,
75 become educated, create accountability, and
76 advocate. This church is responding to God’s
77 call to engage in this work as allies in the efforts
78 to create safe and healthy communities.

79 **What might this church say pastorally?**
80 This church includes survivors, bystanders and

Types of gender-based violence
Gender-based violence is physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons. It may characterize or include the following:
Sexual and other physical assault, including murder; rape; sexual harassment (sometimes called bullying); sexual, physical and verbal abuse, including coercion; stalking; intimate relationship violence that includes employment, housing or educational intimidation and obstruction; elder abuse or child abuse; sex-specific torture; reproductive coercion; female genital mutilation; early and forced marriage; honor crimes; "mail-order" brides; dowry violence; practices used to decrease the number of girl babies, such as prenatal sex selection, infanticide or child neglect; sex tourism; forced prostitution; human trafficking for sex; pornography; and violence during armed conflict, including rape, enslavement, torture and murder.

* See previous footnote.

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

81 perpetrators. Gender-based violence affects each differently—some with the terror of being hurt,
82 some with the fear that comes from seeing or hearing about violence, and some with the
83 brokenness of those who do violence to others.

84

85 Our bodies, hearts and minds are beloved by a gracious God who created each person in God's
86 own image (Genesis 1:27) and redeemed us through Christ. God weeps with us because we hurt
87 and betray each other. The body of Christ is wounded and longs for healing.

88

89 Words and acts of healing and reconciliation will be different for different people and
90 circumstances. What is not different is each person's need for God's grace. Through words of
91 pastoral care, this church, made of those who, at the same time, are both saints and sinners, can
92 speak by the power of the Holy Spirit.

93

94 ***With survivors:***

95 God says "No!" to the violence inflicted on us by others. God is against gender-based violence
96 because through it, someone has treated us like an object and violated our bodies, hearts and
97 minds. God has created our whole being and loves us dearly, heart, mind and body.

98

99 Sometimes it seems as if faith is only about our hearts and minds, but faith is also about our
100 bodies. One of our church's pastors writes, "Bodies which have been assaulted and abused are
101 loved by Christ, anticipated in his death, redeemed through his incarnation and resurrection, and
102 will be healed and restored in God's own time. The body remains precious despite the injury
103 done to it."²

104

105 This is good news! God knows and loves us deeply. Our violated bodies are known by Jesus who
106 was also exposed, tormented and wounded. He also cried out to ask why God had forsaken him
107 in his deepest moments of need and fear (Mark 15:34). We are fully beloved, and God promises
108 restoration and healing.

109

110 God does not intend for us to suffer through any abuse or violence. But we live in a broken and
111 sinful world, and we do suffer. In spite of our suffering we need to have the courage to report
112 what has happened. The church is here to accompany us, to remind us that nothing shall separate
113 us from grace and healing in Jesus Christ, not even the one(s) who hurt us (Romans 8:35).

114

115 Together we will speak and act on the promise of resurrection life in Christ, not only for the
116 future but for healing in this life. God seeks to heal the effects of sin that we know too deeply;
117 God's power and presence can bring new life to our bodies, minds and spirits.

118

119 ***With those who commit gender-based violence:***

120 Because we are each beloved by God, God grieves deeply when we inflict gender-based violence
121 on someone. The violence we impose hurts someone God created, and this hurt spreads out
122 through the community.

123

124 Without self-control and giving priority to the need of others to be safe and healthy, we are
125 vulnerable to abusing our strength, thought and action by being violent. We are responsible—and
126 even if it does not seem like there is a way to stop, our recovery from being violent is our
127 responsibility. God calls us to repent and to seek forgiveness.

128
129 Recovery is possible and takes a lot of work. We have to recognize that what we are doing or
130 have done is wrong, and we have to want to change. We need professional help. Guilt may make
131 us feel as if we can never really recover, but God’s grace beckons us into new life.

132
133 Focus on living into God’s grace, trusting God, and letting go of violence. The church is with us
134 through Christ, to hold us accountable for what we have done, to find the help we need, and to
135 help us live in the hope of restoration through God’s grace.

136
137 ***With bystanders:***
138 By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are connected to the pain and fear of others in the body of
139 Christ. Yet gender-based violence affects not only the Church but entire communities and
140 ultimately all of society.

141
142 We are often compelled into silence and fear when we know about gender-based violence. We
143 don’t want to become targets ourselves. Or we may want to protect our status or that of others.
144 But God calls each of us to take care of our neighbors far and near, including those who inflict
145 violence and those who are harmed.

146
147 Each one of us has the responsibility through Christ to intervene in appropriate ways, to work
148 toward healing, and to prevent gender-based violence. Just as God commands that no one has the
149 right to kill another person, as Lutherans we also believe that God calls us to protect each other
150 “from the wickedness and violence of others.”³

151 **1. What is gender-based violence?**

152 Gender-based violence is sin. While it takes many forms, in all its variations gender-based
153 violence attacks, violates and often destroys the good that God brings to life.

154
155 Gender-based violence is physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or other personal harm
156 inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons. It is important to remember that gender-based
157 violence is not only domestic violence or violence among family members.

158
159 It occurs in the Church, workplaces, the educational system, city streets, war, the military, and
160 the health care system. It occurs, for example, by acquaintances, friends, strangers, caregivers,
161 teachers, clergy, coaches, and work supervisors. Through this violence, someone creates or
162 maintains power and control over someone else. God calls us to love. Gender-based violence is
163 not love.

164
165 Governments, activists and experts have amply documented the wide-ranging and long-lasting
166 destructive effects of this violence on victims and survivors, on family and friends, and on the
167 whole human community. It creates not only personal suffering but also losses across the
168 country—of peaceful communities, medical care costs and economic productivity. Gender-based
169 violence is a public health and safety crisis.

171

Incidents across the country**

Two men severely beat and tortured a young gay man and then hung him on a country barbed-wire fence in Wyoming to die. (1998)

A sixth-grade New Jersey girl was sexually harassed every day by a boy, sometimes by groups of students. A female aide harassed her. A teacher witnessed one incident. The principal was “too busy” to meet with the harasser. Under doctor’s orders the next year, she had to withdraw from school. (2012)

A transgender woman was shot in Michigan, her body so badly burned it took 11 days to identify her. (2013)

Three men broke into a home in Wisconsin and raped a woman who was six months pregnant after they beat her husband. (2014)

Two Ohio teen boys videotaped, photographed and tweeted images and commentary of their rape and hours-long assault on an unconscious teen girl. Dozens of students shared the images. At least three adults were indicted for obstruction. (2012)

***These are descriptive narratives of actual events. For reference information, see endnote number 21*

As a community of faith, we also insist that this violence is an assault on spiritual life.

- It rejects the created goodness and dignity that God gives to every human creature.
- It violates the joy and freedom of the reconciled life accomplished through Jesus Christ and given by God for all humankind to enjoy, as individuals and in community.
- It attacks the gifts in each person that are given by the Holy Spirit for the common good.

Simply stated, gender-based violence in all its forms is a sinful rebellion against the triune God and a rejection of God’s good work in this world.

As a church we recognize and deplore the horrific suffering caused by gender-based violence globally. This message focuses on the United States because we believe that this church has a distinct responsibility to address the violence in our own communities.

At the same time, we affirm that national and global analysis and efforts must be related. This church’s global responsibilities depend upon many ecumenical, interfaith and secular partners with whom we are allies in the struggle against gender-based violence.⁴

2. Who is involved?

The scope of gender-based violence is vast. People of all incomes and of all ethnicities and all nations suffer violence inflicted on them by others for gender-based reasons. Gender-based violence happens in both private and public institutions. It occurs globally and nationally. It occurs within this church.

While many different people are affected by gender-based violence, certain people are particularly targeted. Research shows that women and girls are especially targeted; an estimated 40 million in the United States alone have suffered some form of gender-based violence.⁵ Girls are more

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

211 vulnerable than women of other ages. Research also shows that nearly three-fourths of people
212 who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and gender non-conforming have suffered some form of gender-
213 based violence.⁶

214
215 The threat of violence shapes and constrains so many lives. All of these children of God live with
216 the fear of or the memory of gender-based violence.

217
218 Heterosexual men and boys are also targets. There is increasing awareness in society of sexual,
219 physical and psychological violence against heterosexual men and boys, particularly in sports,
220 prisons, hospitals, churches and schools.

221
222 Research indicates that heterosexual men make up the majority of perpetrators. Among some
223 gender-based crimes, some studies point to White men as the slightly largest group of male
224 perpetrators, compared to other men⁷ in this country. As a community of faith, we need to ask
225 difficult and compelling questions about why certain people are targeted and why certain people
226 are perpetrators. This is an important part of the work toward understanding and healing that we
227 must do.

228
229 All people need to work together to create change. As a community of faith, we cannot leave all
230 the work to survivors. Men and boys are crucial leaders in this work.

231 **3. Why do people inflict gender-based violence?**

232 Acts of gender-based violence always involve sinful individual choices to exercise power and
233 control. The choice to inflict violence is a personal responsibility.

234
235 What an individual does is often influenced by personal factors. For example, alcohol and drug
236 use does not cause gender-based violence, but it can increase the severity of harm. A person's
237 experiences of familial violence or post-traumatic stress syndrome, for example, may increase
238 the likelihood of gender-based violence.

239
240 While individuals are culpable, social systems influence individuals' actions. This church has
241 proclaimed that God's grace calls us not only to confront individual sin, but also to confront sin
242 in social systems.⁸

243
244 Social systems are interrelated social relations, habits, laws, ideas and beliefs in which *everyone*
245 participates in varying ways. Social systems can contribute to good and evil. Both individual and
246 social power can be used for good or for ill.

247
248 In the United States, for example, we have a social system that works in racist ways.⁹ It also
249 works in patriarchal ways, that is, in ways that assert and legitimize male superiority and male
250 dominance.

251
252 Our society values, tends to identify with, and benefits some men more than other people.¹⁰ A
253 patriarchal social system has various forms of control over people, which can cause fear in
254 women and girls and in people who are gender and sexually non-conforming. Gender-based
255 violence is a powerful tool of fear and control.

256

Voices across the ELCA **

A week after my hysterectomy, my husband dragged me off the couch by my hair and screamed, "Get off your ass and get to work!" Then he kicked me in the abdomen. I bled profusely while our daughters hid in their closet.

A trusted peer and friend sexually assaulted me at a Lutheran youth event. My mentor had little response. Nothing was ever resolved.

I tried to counsel an abusive husband and abused wife. During a session, he pulled a gun and killed her and himself.

When I was a teen, my pastor made me feel special. He coerced me into a long-term sexual relationship with him.

Four or five men gang-raped me after I marched in a gay pride parade. The only one who stopped to help me was a pastor going by on his bike. He covered my naked body with his jacket.

I attended a Lutheran college and was date-raped as a sophomore. I reported it to my dorm head, but it was hushed up and never investigated.

***These are descriptive narratives shared by members of the ELCA with permission.*

The values of a patriarchal social system are readily apparent, for example, in media and gaming portrayals of women and men, the glorification of male sports and athletes, cultural complicity with commercial sexual exploitation,¹¹ and continuing gender-based bias in the legal system.¹²

The values of a racist social system intersect with patriarchal values in gender-based violence, as is readily apparent in the fact that women of color are particularly targeted. For example, often at the hands of outsiders, American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls suffer from gender-based violence at a much higher rate than all other women.¹³ Racism also affects the rate of reporting among communities of color, immigrants and citizens alike.¹⁴

The U.S. social system also functions in ways that devalue people according to age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status and ethnicity. All of these forms of privilege and oppression play a role in gender-based violence, including who is targeted and how readily a victim feels safe enough to report a crime of gender-based violence.

These various social system factors can cause immense harm. For example, they can lead to victim-blaming, failures to hold perpetrators accountable, and views that gender-based violence is so ordinary that it is inevitable.

Understanding the connection between patriarchy and gender-based violence is important in order to create change. There are also religious factors that aggravate the problems of gender-based violence. Most religions contribute in some way.

4. How does Christianity sometimes contribute to these problems?

For too long the whole human community has ignored, minimized, covered up, rationalized and justified the destructive effects of gender-based violence. We also acknowledge how the Christian community, a body with bystanders, perpetrators and survivors, has participated in this failing. Too often the

295 Christian community has given its tacit or explicit consent to this violence. In doing so, Christian
296 communities have too often betrayed the sources of faith.

297
298 Some instances of this betrayal demand particular attention. First, Christians have engaged in or
299 tolerated the misuse of Scripture. Second, they have also distorted the message of God's
300 forgiving mercy through Christ into a cruel demand to minimize or justify continued violence or
301 abuse.

302

303 There are a number of ways Scripture is misused that can contribute to legitimizing gender-based
304 violence. For example, the book of Genesis has been misused to argue for a God-given hierarchy
305 of humans and a view that females are more sinful than males. New Testament texts referring to
306 female submission and obedience to men are misused as a guidebook for contemporary
307 relationships and as justification of corporal punishment.

308
309 Christians often ignore the diverse and complex names and metaphors for God in Scripture. This
310 can lead to the impression that God should be viewed as male, further reinforcing the belief that
311 females are more sinful than males and “lower” than males in creation.

312
313 Scripture is sinfully misused when it is used to excuse or legitimize violence that violates the life
314 God gives in Jesus Christ. When Scripture is misused to establish a hierarchy among humans, it
315 can become easy to see women and girls as less valuable and worthy than men and boys, thus
316 legitimizing violence against them.

317
318 We see this, for example, in the long church history of blaming victims for rape and battery¹⁵ and
319 in some of Martin Luther’s own writing on relationships between husbands and wives.¹⁶ These
320 views continue to be expressed whenever anyone is told that suffering because of gender-based
321 violence is their cross to bear and that they should suffer like Jesus did.

322
323 Scripture is also distorted when Christians demand that survivors forgive perpetrators or
324 bystanders easily and/or quickly. The treasure of God’s forgiveness belongs to God. What God
325 offers to repentant sinners is not for Christians to demand of anyone.

326
327 Christians are not in a position to demand forgiveness by others for others. Coercing someone to
328 forgive may actually subvert healing and accountability.

329
330 Beyond the misuse of Scripture and forgiveness, Christian churches and individuals too often
331 have contributed to gender-based violence through denial, resistance and a lack of preparation.

332
333 We are in denial when we avoid or refuse to see the broad and multiple realities of the problem.
334 We are in denial when we misname problems, saying, for example, that sexual assault and rape
335 are “just” hazing in certain settings. Resistance is apparent in silence and inaction or in the ways
336 we try to discredit hints or reports of violence. Both denial and resistance happen in society in
337 general and in specific communities. It is hard to avoid denial and resistance, but it is important
338 to overcome it.

339
340 At other times, we may not be stuck in denial or resistance, but we may not become the allies we
341 should be through a lack of preparation and prevention. For example, having little or faulty
342 knowledge, lacking partnerships with local organizations and other faith communities, and
343 operating with inadequate policies and practices contribute to the problem.

344
345 In short, we must confess that Christians have too often contributed to victim-blaming, to failures
346 to hold perpetrators accountable, to excuses for violence, and to subversion and curtailment of
347 healing.

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

348 **5. Where is God in the midst of the problems and pain and suffering?**

349 Despite these failures, this church believes that God is at work to heal and to restore. Despite the
350 misuses of Scripture and forgiveness, we will abandon neither.

351
352 Every survivor is loved and cared for by God. God does not intend people to be hurt. God is with
353 every victim. Scripture speaks of this, from God's sorrow over Israel's suffering to Jesus' pain
354 on the cross.

355
356 The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus of Nazareth. Time and again, Jesus'
357 ministry took the form of healing pain. God, through the church, continues this ministry.

358
359 On the cross, Jesus Christ took on all sin and death for our sakes. We no longer need to live with
360 death and sin upon us. And in the resurrection, God, through Christ, is making a new creation,
361 mending what is broken and sending the healing presence of the Holy Spirit to dwell among us.

362
363 We know the presence and power of the triune God in word and sacrament, the means through
364 which God is with us and forms us into the one body of Christ. As St. Paul reminded one early
365 Christian community, what affects one member of the body affects every member of the body (1
366 Corinthians 12:26a).

367
368 Both harm and healing within the body of Christ belong to each and every one of us. As Luther
369 taught, through the eating and drinking together in Christ, we participate in "all the unjust
370 suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing."¹⁷ Having
371 suffered through any member of the body of Christ who suffers, we are all always being made
372 new by the Holy Spirit. Together.

373
374 From a Lutheran perspective, we understand God's work in the world and in us through both law
375 and gospel. We believe that we live under the law while we live *because* of the gospel. The Ten
376 Commandments oppose human beings hurting each other. They are instructions on living
377 faithfully with God and in community. Understanding that God condemns sin and promises
378 grace helps us in the face of gender-based violence to confess our sin as a church, to renounce it,
379 and to set clear boundaries against evil.

380
381 Because of God's love for us, we are freed to live in the same love and care for others. Martin
382 Luther talked about this freedom in Christ as freedom from bondage to sin and freedom for
383 others—freedom to love the neighbor. This love and care—born of risk and listening to others—
384 very often takes the form of justice-making.

385
386 This love and care leads us to join others of good will to be God's hands in the midst of the
387 problem. As Lutherans we affirm the value of good social-scientific analysis of the realities of
388 violence as well as both civil and criminal law. These are God's gifts in creation for countering
389 the violence and bringing change.

390
391 By the power of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is active in us to see the neighbor's need and to
392 respond to individuals and communities in crisis and recovery. God's grace is also active in us to
393 change the social and religious factors that may allow or encourage gender-based violence.

394 **6. What should we do?**

395 This church, as one expression of the body of Christ, not only laments gender-based violence but
396 also condemns it. This church commits itself to the many acts, steps and forms of healing it
397 requires. We are called to create change in the various expressions of this church and in
398 collaboration with our partners. We are also called to foster change within social and public
399 spheres.¹⁸

400 **A. What are we called to do within this church?**

401 Everyone can make a difference. Everyone is called to pray and to grow in awareness of this
402 horrific tragedy. Many people are called to respond to particular situations. Like Tamar, many
403 people are called to speak up.

404
405 Church members and leaders are called to be different from King David by actually taking up
406 leadership. This includes becoming long-term allies with each other and with other agencies and
407 institutions in the struggle against gender-based violence.

408
409 Many people in this church are already engaged in important efforts to address such violence, for
410 which this whole church is thankful. They are instrumental in encouraging others.

411
412 Although specific actions will take shape differently among individuals, congregations, church
413 leaders, social ministry organizations, and church-related institutions or other agencies of this
414 church, there are common aims. [See foundational documentation for more detailed
415 descriptions.]

- 416
417 1. Recognize, name and root out the violence and its sources wherever it is happening.
418 2. Ensure care and create safe communities that foster healing.
419 3. Provide education.
420 4. Create accountability.

421
422 **Recognize, name, and root out**

423 Historically much gender-based violence has not been recognized for what it is. This church has
424 an opportunity to step forward to honestly recognize and name gender-based violence under such
425 guises as "submission," or prostitution, or derogatory talk about people who are gender non-
426 conforming. This church will be committed to careful work to identify sources in both church
427 and society that foster, encourage or tacitly support gender-based violence and to root out these
428 sources by, for example, naming them in sermons or discussing them in educational settings.

429
430 **Ensure care and create safe and healing communities**

431 Varied efforts are necessary to ensure care and create healing communities. When someone is
432 hurt, people in this church need to respond effectively and in collaboration with experts.

433
434 Yet the best intervention and care will be possible when individuals, congregations and
435 institutions have already taken steps in advance. Such steps might include hosting educational
436 events, getting information to people safely, reaching out to experts in the field for guidance and
437 partnerships, or opening a congregation's building to a support group. Intervention and care also
438 include learning to identify signs of gender-based violence in order to respond proactively.

439

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

440 Survivors most often need expert care and pastoral care. Adequate care requires having in place
441 networks of support beyond the initial crises. It also requires knowing how to access local expert
442 care-giving and advocacy agencies. Caring for survivors takes wisdom, preparation and a
443 position of support, rather than blame, for victims and survivors.

444
445 Perpetrators of intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence need expert
446 professional intervention and accountability. This is critical.

447
448 Perpetrators often seek pastoral care. Pastors and other leaders may accompany perpetrators with
449 confession and repentance. Their repentance, however, does not require or automatically ensure
450 forgiveness from the survivor, now or later. There are also times that this church or the civil law
451 requires pastors and others to report violence and actively to seek to prevent further violence
452 from occurring.

453
454 **Provide education**

455 Education is fundamental to creating safe and caring communities and contributes to prevention.
456 For example, practical education about gender-based violence can occur in adult education
457 forums, youth groups, college classrooms and continuing education events for rostered leaders.
458 Such education will seek to offer comprehensive views, challenge mindsets and teach wise
459 responses to gender-based violence and its sources.

460
461 Education should also cover religious-based contributions to the problem. It should include, for
462 example, probing historical and contemporary religious ideas that have caused harm. The
463 benefits will become evident when members and leaders of the ELCA engage in dialogue, study
464 and action among ecumenical partners to discern both roadblocks and resources within Christian
465 theological and practical traditions.

466
467
468
469
470 **Create accountability**
471 Care must also be linked to clear accountability. Those who inflict gender-based violence need to
472 be held accountable even while being cared for. This includes accountability to those harmed, to
473 the public good and, sometimes, to the community of faith.

474
475 The critical need for accountability creates a role for this church in challenging the fact that the
476 majority of perpetrators remain free and in communities. Communities of faith will by necessity
477 have to wrestle with the need for accountability of perpetrators and the safety and well-being of
478 survivors within the same community.

479
480 Careful attention to accountability in institutions will help prevent and counter acts of violence.
481 Every agency, organization and institution should review its policies, or absence of such, to
482 assess how well it provides for prevention, safety and adequate response. Attention to
483 accountability assists in creating justice.

484 **B. What do we seek and advocate be done in the wider society?**

485 This church announces that the God who justifies expects all people and social institutions to do
486 justice and foster practices that serve the common good.¹⁹ Seeking change in the social order to
487 reduce gender-based violence requires multiple and varied measures in diverse spheres with a
488 long-term commitment.

489
490 Advocacy and action will take shape differently when directed toward a local organization, a
491 local community, or the state or federal sphere. They will be different when sought by individual
492 Christians as citizens than when sought through the ELCA's various institutional efforts as a
493 public church. Yet the common aim is to participate in robust advocacy and action that fosters
494 safe and healthy communities. This church is encouraged to: [See foundational documentation
495 for more detailed descriptions.]

- 496 1. Become allies with others.
- 497 2. Seek improved laws and social patterns.
- 498 3. Challenge organizations and agencies to adopt and use policies and practices that prevent
499 and reduce gender-based violence.

500
501 **Become allies**
502 Members of this church, congregational task forces, leaders of social ministry organizations and
503 educational institutions, along with many others, will need to become allies with others in society
504 to make clear what policies and practices will reduce gender-based violence. This church has the
505 opportunity to demonstrate that faith communities can make a positive difference.

506
507 In determining what works and what is needed, the voices of those who are often silenced must
508 be given a preferential hearing. Becoming allies toward change includes, for example, being
509 advocates who seek improved laws and practices, challenging harmful mindsets, and insisting on
510 holding perpetrators accountable.

511
512 In other words, this church's social witness must be prophetic in character.²⁰ It must call into
513 question long-standing beliefs or practices with loving words and actions that challenge and may
514 be uncomfortable.

515
516 **Improve laws and social patterns**
517 Addressing the root sources of gender-based violence will require time, informed and committed
518 people, and systemic change through the development and application of laws and practices.
519 While varied in form and different for different social spheres, the over-arching goals must be to
520 name, protect, provide care, create accountability, foster education and challenge mindsets. This
521 church, aware of its own failures, still must witness to and urge the pursuit of such goals within
522 the social order, an order that ultimately answers to the God of justice.

523
524 **Adopt and use policies and practices**
525 Within the social order, a vast number of organizations and agents need to be challenged to adopt
526 and use policies and practices that prevent or reduce gender-based violence. Employers and
527 corporations, sporting organizations, educational institutions, the health care system, public and
528 private social caregivers, the judicial system, the military, and members of the media and
529 emerging social media are among those to be challenged. Again, this church has a role to play
530 through its members in these various spheres and in raising its collective and institutional voice.

531 **7. Conclusion**

532 As God's church we are David, Amnon, Absalom and Tamar. Like King David, we have the
533 means to intervene. Like Amnon, we commit gender-based violence. Like Absalom, we both
534 silence victims and are tempted to retaliate with further violence. Like Tamar, we are targets of
535 violence and try to resist it.

536
537 This is the time to speak and to listen, to deeply and honestly know the pain in the body of Christ
538 and throughout the world. This is the time for survivors to speak and to be heard. This is the time
539 to break the silence. This is the time to respond with wisdom and compassion through action and
540 words. This is the time to wisely care for perpetrators and to hold them accountable.

541
542 This is the time to change policies, strengthen laws and challenge systemic factors that create and
543 foster gender-based violence. This is the time to transform negative religious influences and to
544 improve prevention and response within this church.

545
546 The evil of gender-based violence necessitates different kinds of efforts from congregations,
547 leaders, synods, the churchwide organization, and church-related social ministries and
548 educational institutions—and it pleads for a collective response.

549
550 May the triune God empower and direct us to name the problems, ensure wise care, provide
551 education, create accountability, and become courageous and wise allies in creating safe and
552 healthy communities.

553

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

554 Endnotes

¹ Gender refers to categories into which cultures/societies separate behaviors and characteristics that are usually considered masculine or feminine. The most common gender identities are *woman* and *man*, but other identities exist and are becoming more widely used and understood.

² Joy A. Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment: Incarnating Healing," in *The Long Journey Home*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 193.

³ Martin Luther, Large Catechism in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 411.

⁴ See "Churches Say No to Violence Against Women," available on www.Lutheranworld.org.

⁵ See the related Foundational Documentation of this social message on Gender-based Violence for statistics at the time of publication and for more extensive analysis and information suggested in this message.

⁶ There is, of course, an intersection between these two aggregate groups of people particularly targeted. Girls and women may be lesbian, bisexual or gender non-conforming.

⁷ The most recent studies of hate violence show that in 2013, 39 percent of perpetrators were perceived as White by victims, the highest percentage compared to other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Of all men who perpetrate gender and sexuality-based hate violence, the highest percentage is found among those 19 to 29 years old (30.7 percent). 72.45 percent of all perpetrators were male as opposed to female or transgender. See Osman Ahmed and Chai Jindasurant, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2013* (New York, N.Y.: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2014), 51-53.

⁸ See ELCA social statement "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective" (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), esp. 4-5, 7. <http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society>

⁹ See ELCA social statement "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture" (Chicago: ELCA, 1993).

<http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-and-Culture>

¹⁰ See, e.g., "ELCA Message on Community Violence" (Chicago: ELCA, 1994), 4.

<http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Community-Violence> and "ELCA Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation" (Chicago: ELCA, 2001), 2, 4. <http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation>

¹¹ See "ELCA Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation," esp. 5, 7.

¹² See the Foundational Documentation for further explanation.

¹³ American Indian/Alaska Native women are targets of gender-based violence at a rate of 37.5 percent; among all women in the United States, the aggregate rate is 25 percent. For further information, see the Foundational Documentation.

¹⁴ For a discussion of risks for marginalized communities, see ELCA social statement "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries" (Chicago: ELCA, 2013), esp. 13. <http://www.ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Criminal-Justice>

¹⁵ See biblical texts portraying gender-based violence; for further explanation of these texts, see Joy A. Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Martin Luther, "Titus, 1527," *Luther's Works*. (American ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 29:55. [Note: These endnotes will be updated to reflect the most recent edition.]

¹⁷ Martin Luther, "Word and Sacrament, I" *Luther's Works*, 35:54.

¹⁸ For specific resources, please go to www.ELCA.org.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, "For Peace in God's World"

²⁰ *Ibid.*, "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective."

²¹ Incident across the Country are summarized from the following sources:

a) Matthew Shepard Foundation, <http://www.matthewshepard.org/about-us/>; b) Michelle Caffrey (July 14, 2014) Williamstown Middle School student faced severe sexual harassment, school did nothing, lawsuit claims, *South New Jersey Times* http://www.nj.com/gloucester-county/index.ssf/2014/07/williamstown_middle_school_student_faced_severe_and_pervasive_sexual_harassment_and_school_did_nothi.html ; c) Gus Burns (December 10, 2013) Medical examiner identifies body of transgender woman found shot, burned in Detroit trash bin, *Michigan Live*

http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2013/12/medical_examiner_identifies_bo.html ; d)

Associated Press (March 13, 2014) Blind man beaten, pregnant wife raped in Wisconsin home invasion, police say, *Fox News* <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/03/13/wisconsin-home-invaders-beat-blind-husband-raped-pregnant->

Text as adopted by ELCA Church Council on November 14, 2015. A final copy edit and format revision have yet to be done according to ELCA publication style; this preliminary version should be cited or referenced as such.

[wife-police-say/](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/17/sports/high-school-football-rape-case-unfolds-online-and-divides-steubenville-ohio.html?_r=0); e) Juliet Macur and Nate Schweber (December 16, 2012) Rape Case Unfolds on Web and Splits City, *New York Times* http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/17/sports/high-school-football-rape-case-unfolds-online-and-divides-steubenville-ohio.html?_r=0