

Recommendation on Social Statements



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Background

At its March 2010 meeting, the Conference of Bishops raised questions related to the capacity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to deal with the list of pending social policy documents currently under development. Similar concerns were voiced by members of the ELCA Church Council.

At its April 2010 meeting, the ELCA Church Council voted [CC10.04.15]:

To affirm the current time line for the development of a social statement on genetics for consideration by the 2011 Churchwide Assembly; and

To request the Church in Society program unit to convene conversations related to the development of future social statements and to bring a report and possible recommendations to the November 2010 meeting of the Church Council.

As the Church in Society program unit considered the question of capacity, it identified three statements that provide a summary of concerns that have been raised:

1. This church is committed to the practice of moral deliberation and, while not universal, there is increasing appreciation for social documents.
2. Some in this church have described feeling burdened by the rapid succession, overlapping time lines, and controversial aspects of developing documents.
3. Despite a reduction in the number of staff within the churchwide organization responsible for studies, the time line approved prior to the reduction has been maintained.

The Church in Society program unit indicated that there were many guiding concerns to be considered in the development of social policy documents, including social statements:

1. Maintaining the integrity of the established five-year process for the development of social statements with commitments to:
 - a. A task force-driven process that does not pre-conceive an outcome;
 - b. Broad churchwide participation in a way that continues reasonable quantity and quality of involvement of all stakeholders;
 - c. The following processes, with adjustment as appropriate:
 - 1) Multiple opportunities for input and response;
 - 2) Task forces composed of a diverse range of competencies;
 - 3) A study;

- 4) A draft;
 - 5) Hearings on the draft;
 - 6) A proposed document; and
 - 7) Formal involvement by elected churchwide leadership, including the unit program committee and the appropriate committees of the Conference of Bishops and Church Council.
2. Scheduling development of social documents so there is only one major document at any one time involving formal input from the elected churchwide leadership. It is critical to distinguish the capacity of the formal churchwide leadership from the capacity of stakeholders, congregations, and other ministry sites, noting that the stakeholders and interest groups vary for each process and often do not overlap.
 3. Related assumptions:
 - a. The pending decision of the 2011 Churchwide Assembly related to a proposed triennial Churchwide Assembly cycle would require further adjustment in the schedule.
 - b. Additional staffing reductions would require further adjustment in the schedule.

The report noted that the following social policy statements currently were in process: message on disabilities (Church Council, November 2010); social statement on genetics (2011 Churchwide Assembly); message on mental health (Church Council, April 2011); social statement on criminal justice (2013 Churchwide Assembly); social statement on justice for women (2015 Churchwide Assembly).

At its November 2010 meeting, the Church Council voted [CC10.11.61]:

To request that future social documents be scheduled with sensitivity to the time demands involving elected churchwide leadership, including bishops, Church Council members and synodical leaders;

To acknowledge the preference that only one major document be in process at any one time;

To adopt the schedule provided [below]. . . ; and

To request that the Program and Services Committee, at its November 2011 meeting and considering the actions of the 2011 Churchwide Assembly, reassess the revised time line and question of capacity.

The schedule adopted is as follows:

Social Statement on Genetics

Fall 2010: Hearings
Winter 2011: Proposed Statement
Spring 2011: Church Council consideration
Summer 2011: Churchwide Assembly consideration
Fall 2011: Publication, if adopted

Social Statement on Criminal Justice

Winter 2011: Study
Spring 2011: Study
Summer 2011: Study
Fall 2011: Study
Spring 2012: Hearings on draft statement
Summer 2012: Hearings on draft statement
Fall 2012: Hearings on draft statement
Winter 2013: Proposed statement
Spring 2013: Church Council consideration
Summer 2013: Churchwide Assembly consideration
Fall 2013: Publication, if adopted

Social Statement on Justice for Women

Fall 2012: Formation of Task Force
Fall 2014: Study
Winter 2015: Study
Spring 2015: Study
Summer 2017: Churchwide Assembly Consideration

Message on Persons Living with Disabilities

Fall 2010: Proposed Message
Church Council Consideration
Winter 2011: Publication

Message on Mental Health Issues

Fall 2011: Consultation
Winter 2012: Proposed Message
Spring 2012: Church Council Consideration
Publication, if adopted

At its April 2011 meeting, the Church Council received the report of the task force on Living Into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT). It voted [CC11.04.36]:

To thank the Living into the Future Together (LIFT) task force and the Planning and Evaluation Committee for their work on the report and recommendations of the task force;

To refer the work of finalizing recommendations in the LIFT report and the development of proposed implementing resolutions for the task force's report and recommendations to a writing team consisting of members of the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Office of the Secretary, the Planning and Evaluation Committee, and the LIFT task force; and

To anticipate an electronic meeting of the Church Council in May 2011 to consider the recommendations and proposed implementing resolutions.

In addition, the Church Council voted [CC11.04.23] to recommend to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly the following action:

To authorize the Church Council, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and Communal Discernment Task Force, to establish a review process of current procedures for the development and adoption of social statements, following the consideration of the genetics social statement, *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*, at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

At its May 23, 2011, meeting, the Church Council approved amended recommendations, based on the LIFT task force report, as well as implementing resolutions to be transmitted to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. One of those implementing resolutions concerned social statements:

10. To bring, with the exception of the social statement *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*, no social statements to Churchwide Assemblies until a review of the process for addressing social concerns based on a spirit of communal discernment is completed.

**Recommendation
for Assembly Action**

To authorize the Church Council, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and Communal Discernment Task Force, to establish a review process of current procedures for the development and adoption of social statements, following the consideration of the genetics social statement, *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*, at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.