

Biennial Plan of Studies 2011–2013



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

Statement of Purpose

Since its adoption at the first Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1989, “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” has been affirmed and revised. At its April 2011 meeting, the Church Council adapted the policies and procedures to the redesigned churchwide organization. As printed in Section V of this volume, p. 3–4, the document states:

The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in order to assist members of this church in their study of social concerns, shall propose the study of selected topics and the development of relevant resources (people, networks, materials) and study material. In doing so, it shall assemble for most projects a team of people, often including individuals from congregations, synods, ELCA institutions, and agencies of this church in accord with this church's principles of representation. In selecting topics and developing resources, the office shall draw upon the wealth of expertise and interest in social concerns within this church and shall base its decisions upon ongoing and wide-ranging consultation with relevant members and groups throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including the Conference of Bishops.

The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall report its activities in this sphere to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly and shall promote its work throughout this church.

Review of Social Statement Process

If adopted by the 2011 Churchwide Assembly, a recommendation of the Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT) task force calls for a review of the social statement process to be undertaken by the Church Council during the coming biennium. The results of the review may shift the character of the activities and processes described here. Therefore, the following listing is subject to change and development.

Publications

Social Statement on Genetics

The social statement on genetics, *Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility*, comes before the 2011 Churchwide Assembly for action. If adopted as the eleventh social statement of the ELCA, the full text would be available online by November 2011 and the printed version published by the end of January 2012. A Spanish translation will be available by early spring 2012.

Study Guide to *Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility*

A DVD-format study guide for the statement is anticipated for November 2012. As a guide for studying and understanding the social statement, the DVD format provides a flexible structure that accommodates different settings and multiple entry points for varied audiences.

Study Guide to *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*

A DVD-format study guide for *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is anticipated for November 2013. As directed by the implementing resolutions within the statement, the four studies (including one for youth) developed between 2002 and 2006 by the Task Force for ELCA Studies of Sexuality will be kept available online and in print form.

“Draft of a Social Statement on Criminal Justice”

The “Draft of a Social Statement on Criminal Justice,” prepared by the ELCA Criminal Justice Task force, will be published in March 2012. Pending a possible review of the social statement process, a proposed social statement is anticipated for release in winter 2013 and would be brought to the Church Council for recommendation to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. If adopted by the assembly, the social statement will be published in late 2013. A Spanish translation would be available in early 2014.

The ELCA Criminal Justice Task Force met by conference call in early 2011 and is expected to meet in fall of 2011, twice in 2012, and in January 2013, in order to complete its work. Hearings on the “Draft of a Social Statement on Criminal Justice” would be held in 2013.

Social Message on Disabilities

A social message on disabilities, “People Living with Disabilities,” was published in early 2011 in English; a Spanish translation is anticipated for publication in fall of 2011. The text of the message is printed in Section V of this volume, beginning on page 9.

Social Message on Mental Illness

A message on mental illness was authorized by the Church Council in November 2009, and a process for development will be initiated in spring 2012. A proposed message would then be brought to the Church Council for consideration in fall 2012 and published early in the following year.

Journal of Lutheran Ethics

This free, online journal will continue to publish bi-monthly articles on current issues and classical themes in Christian ethics (www.elca.org/jle).

Studies Resources

A complimentary copy of any study resource can be ordered by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2580, emailing RIS@elca.org, or ordering online at www.elca.org/resources. Multiple copies are available for a small fee and the cost of shipping.

Activities and Processes

Social Statement on Justice for Women

As authorized by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, Theological Discernment will initiate the formation of a task force to develop a social statement regarding justice for women. A consultation is scheduled for fall of 2011 and the first task force meeting will be held in spring of 2012, followed by two meetings per year through 2013. Task force meetings during this biennium would be dedicated to educating the task force about the social, theological, and ethical issues involved. Listening posts involving ELCA members will be held during this period as well.

Journal of Lutheran Ethics

Staff will continue to network with contributing editors of and other contributors to the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* to encourage online reflection and discussion of Christian ethics from diverse audiences. In the fall of 2011, the journal will announce its student essay competition, inviting graduate students and seminarians to respond in a short essay to a topic proposed by the editor.

Annual Gathering of Lutheran Ethicists

Studies will convene annual meetings of Lutheran Ethicists in 2012 (Washington, D.C.) and 2013 (Chicago). The 2012 themes and meeting are being coordinated with leadership from among U.S. military chaplains.

Faith and Science

A member of Theological Discernment will serve as the churchwide organization's liaison with the ELCA Alliance for Faith, Science, and Technology and as contact for other networks in order to promote education and awareness of issues involving science and faith. This work is anticipated to maintain the ELCA website and connections with The Ecumenical Roundtable for Science and Technology in the Church.

Additional Information

Additional information is available through the ELCA website: www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues.aspx.