



Report of the Church in Society Unit

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Statement of Purpose

The Church in Society (CS) program unit assists this church “to discern, understand, and respond to the needs of human beings, communities, society, and the whole creation through direct human services and through addressing systems, structures, and policies of society, seeking to promote justice, peace, and the care of the earth.” The constitutional description of this unit appears in continuing resolution 16.12.D06., printed in Section X of this volume. The report on the work of Justice for Women will be provided in Section V of this volume.

Report of Work 2007–2009

Moral Deliberation

Moral deliberation is the pursuit of understanding through respectful dialogue among Christians on issues over which they may disagree. It demonstrates the importance of a community that embraces not only people who differ in externals but those who differ in moral perspectives. It

witnesses to the belief that the unity of the baptized is in Christ and not in human traditions or social conditions. Discussion also prepares for action on pressing social issues.

The unit promotes moral deliberation through the development of social policy in the form of social statements, social policy resolutions, and messages, as well as study documents, teaching materials, conferences, and listening posts. During this biennium, the draft social statement on human sexuality provided an opportunity for dialogue around a difficult topic. More than 2,000 response forms, 111 synod hearings, and 1,000 pieces of direct mail—not to mention an untold number of personal conversations—indicate considerable ownership of this democratic process that concludes at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis.

Because society is moving into an age of genetics with unprecedented choices and responsibilities, the study document “Genetics and Faith: Power, Choice, and Responsibility,” published in November 2008, is facilitating conversations in congregations and other settings on how Christians may respond to the profound questions posed by biotechnology. A draft social statement on genetics will be available in 2010 and a proposed social statement on that subject will be considered at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

Social policy resolutions are another aid to moral deliberation, but on a limited topic. Because the ELCA has expressed serious concern about gambling, on the one hand, and has supported the sovereignty of American Indian tribes, on the other, a social policy resolution titled “The Sponsorship of Legal Gaming by American Indian Tribes” was adopted by the Church Council in November 2007 and subsequently published.

Now in its eighth year, the monthly online *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (www.elca.org/jle) offers articles by Lutheran ethicists on a wide range of issues. The database presently includes 680 articles by 350 authors. The online journal averages 24,000 page views per month. Annually, the unit sponsors a gathering of 30–40 Lutheran ethicists.

This unit continues to provide leadership in the area of faith, science, and technology by working closely with the ELCA Alliance for Faith, Science, and Technology and leadership in support of the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence through the ELCA Equipping for Peacemaking Network.

Prophetic *Diakonia*

According to “An Epistle from the Lutheran World Federation Global Consultation on *Diakonia*” (Lutheran World Federation 2002), *diakonia* is central to what it means to be the church and an essential part of discipleship. It states,

“While *diakonia* begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms, and transforms” because it necessarily takes on a prophetic character. According to this Lutheran World Federation (LWF) text, the heart of prophetic *diakonia* is taking the risk of speaking truth to power, even when this threatens the established order, together with people who are marginalized and powerless.

Church in Society seeks to hold up prophetic *diakonia* as the proper leadership style for public church ministry. The unit convenes the Alliance on Poverty and Wealth, a mechanism for maintaining the ELCA’s focus on poverty. The unit provided training for people working in low-income communities on disaster planning. Young adults also were recruited to attend the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City in July 2008.

The Poverty Ministries Networking program sponsored the Diakonia Leadership Institute, a training process that supports leadership and skill development of low-income lay leaders in urban and rural ELCA congregations. In November 2008, 150 persons attended an ELCA conference on poverty and wealth in Atlanta, Ga.

Consultation services in support of congregational and community social ministry was provided to Arab and Middle Eastern ministries as well as to African National ministries. Staff also gave considerable attention to long-term recovery strategies for New Orleans and surrounding areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

From Summer 2008 through Spring 2009, 18 synods held “Vital Congregations—Just Communities” trainings on congregation-based organizing, with 40–100 participants at each.

Eradicating Chronic Hunger and Pervasive Poverty

The ELCA World Hunger program, an interunit collaboration directed by this unit, received \$19.2 million through the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal in 2007 and \$21.3 million in 2008. Additional designated funds, including those give through the “Stand With Africa” campaign, were received in the amounts of \$904,000 in 2007 and \$820,000 in 2008. ELCA World Hunger funds are allocated domestically and internationally in the four areas of relief, development, education, and advocacy. The unit awarded domestic hunger discretionary grants totaling \$913,000 for relief, development, and community organizing to 360 organizations in 2007 and grants totaling \$708,000 to 250 organizations in 2008. Additional grants supported the work of such programs as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Bread for the World, and the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia. Below-market loans assisted community-development projects.

Together with grants, activities in hunger education and advocacy carry out the deep commitment of this church to eradicate the scandal of poverty as expressed in the 2005 Churchwide Assembly hunger resolution and in the objectives of the hunger program. The ELCA World Hunger program

has launched a new interactive curriculum for children and youth and an outdoor ministry pilot project, in collaboration with the Vocation and Education unit.

Advocating for Justice, Peace, and Care for Creation

The advocacy ministry of this church, administered through this unit, occurs at the state level through 19 state capitol offices, at the federal level through the ELCA Washington Office, globally through the Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC) at the United Nations, a ministry shared with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and in relation to the private sector through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program.

The ELCA Washington Office provided leadership on issues relating to trade, international development and foreign aid, debt forgiveness, HIV and AIDS, and various conflict areas around the globe, including Darfur, Sudan, Colombia, Iraq, and Indonesia. This office leads the ONE Lutheran Campaign, an initiative providing ELCA support to the Millennium Development Goals. The Washington Office also gave special attention through increased staffing to “Peace Not Walls,” the ELCA strategy to work for peace in the Middle East, particularly between Israelis and Palestinians.

This office focused on policy addressing the causes of and solutions to hunger, homelessness, and unemployment, especially related to federal safety net programs and supportive services to help people transition out of poverty. There is an ongoing focus on health care reform, the economic crisis, and residential mortgage policy. The Washington Office also focused on U.S. policy related to climate change, alternative energy, rural development, and agriculture policy with particular attention to carbon emissions control, conservation, and the promotion of new “green” jobs. The office related to the ELCA’s earthkeeping network and to eco-education initiatives for synods and congregations.

The Washington Office worked to engage ELCA synodical bishops across five issue caucuses known as “ready benches” in order to keep them informed for public speaking, writing, and engagement with government leaders. These five groups address U.S. hunger and poverty, international hunger and poverty, Middle East policy, environmental policy, and immigration policy. Advocacy staff members also regularly engage student advocacy teams, host congregations and synodical bishops, and work with an increasing online network of approximately 27,000 persons (www.elca.org/advocacy).

Lutheran state public policy directors worked in 19 states to engage networks in hunger, housing, economic development, and climate change with special attention to state budgets and supportive services, such as child care, education, and health.

The Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC) engages with a range of issues at the United Nations, conveying the views of this church and of the LWF to the U.N. and advising a broad constituency on emerging issues of potential interest. Among the issues given particular focus were Israel-Palestine, the status of women, humanitarian

crises, the Millennium Development Goals, HIV and AIDS, and inter-religious and intercultural dialogue for peace.

LOWC called the attention of the ELCA to the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by hosting a consultation on the churches' role in promoting human rights. It provided leadership for the Ecumenical Women coalition. The office encouraged and involved Christian young adults in international issues through internships in New York, leadership training events in Rwanda and Kenya, and scholarships to attend the 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program collaborates with ecumenical partners in advocating to the private sector on the basis of ELCA social policy. During this biennium, this program updated social criteria investment screens that were approved by the ELCA Church Council. These screens enable church-affiliated agencies and institutions as well as congregation members to implement faith-based investing.

The CSR program was in dialogue with more than 50 companies on a broad range of issues. These included international human rights, toxins in the environment, and diversity on corporate boards. It took a leadership role in working with ecumenical partners to call the banking community to address policies concerning lending, to urge "big box" stores to promote energy efficiency, and to remind corporations in sub-Saharan Africa of their responsibility to address the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Leveraging Relationships for Service and Advocacy

Given the magnitude of human and environmental needs and the finitude of the ELCA's capacity to address these needs, it is vital to collaborate with other Lutheran, ecumenical, interfaith, governmental, and civil society organizations.

The ELCA is a sponsoring partner of Lutheran Services in America (LSA), along with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the 300 affiliated or recognized Lutheran social ministry organizations, together serving six million people each year in the U.S. and the Caribbean. In 2008 LSA began its second decade with a new vision for its work, which calls for loving and serving the neighbor through healthy Lutheran agencies and institutions and leading a movement of hope toward a more just and caring society. During the current recession, most Lutheran social ministry organizations are seeing increased demand for services, delayed and declining government support, credit issues, decreased private funding, and negative impact on volunteer capacity.

The Church in Society unit manages the affiliation process for ELCA social ministry organizations. During the past two years, 14 new organizations were affiliated, three merged with other ELCA-affiliated social ministry organizations, four were removed from affiliation, and two were reinstated. Annually, this unit grants funds that support Lutheran Services in America's core budget and the ministry of its peer crisis intervention and peer assessment services.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), a collaborative ministry with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, provides long-term help for those affected by natural and human-caused disasters. In partnership with a network of affiliated Lutheran social ministry organizations, LDR provided spiritual and emotional care, hardship grants, volunteer coordination, and long-term recovery rebuilding and case management. It also worked closely with partner agencies and organizations such as the American Red Cross and Church World Service.

LDR conducted active responses in over 20 ELCA synods following floods, wildfires, tornados, tropical storms, and hurricanes. Because synods and congregations have particular needs and opportunities for service and witness in times of disaster, LDR emphasized accompanying synods and congregations during these difficult times.

Preparedness for future disasters is a high priority for LDR, which is employing a broad variety of resources to encourage individual, family, congregational, and synod-based disaster preparedness.

The ELCA lives out this church's ministry to serve the neighbor by welcoming the stranger through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), in cooperation with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. During this biennium, there was increased public discussion of and legislative efforts on immigration in light of the 12 million undocumented people living in the U.S., even as there was an increase in work-site arrests, such as in Postville, Iowa, and the deportation of immigrants. In a nation struggling over providing a generous welcome to refugees, LIRS annually settled more than 6,000 refugees of 39 nationalities, helping them find homes, jobs, and educational opportunities. It facilitated the release of more than 1,500 children from federal custody to the care of family members. It found foster homes for more than 100 children. It provided legal services to 14,000 detainees, including children, victims of torture, and asylum seekers. It served more than 3,600 persons through job training and placement.

Through LIRS, Lutherans are widely recognized in this country for their leadership in welcoming the stranger.

Responses to Churchwide Actions

Social statement on criminal justice: The ELCA Criminal Justice Task Force had its first meeting in December 2008. In 2009, the task force will review and assess key criminal justice issues through study and listening posts conducted nationwide.

Escalation of war in Iraq: A study guide on the Iraq war has been prepared for use in congregations and other settings.

Advocacy for Darfur: The ELCA Washington Office encouraged Lutherans in the U.S. to learn more about the crisis in Darfur and to advocate for improved U.S. policies in the quest for peace throughout all of Sudan. Free educational DVDs were made available for congregations and promoted through the ELCA advocacy Web site. Action alerts

encouraged U.S. Lutherans to contact former President Bush, President Obama, and their congressional representatives to urge full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the establishment of a meaningful Darfur Peace Agreement, and robust emergency and development funding.

Strategy on HIV and AIDS: In September 2007, an HIV and AIDS consultation with international participants was held as the first step in the development of an ELCA strategy on HIV and AIDS. Subsequently, input has been sought domestically and internationally from churchwide staff, rostered leaders, people living with HIV and AIDS, companion churches, persons of color and those whose primary language is other than English, representatives of Lutheran social ministry organizations, focus groups, the ELCA Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council. The resulting strategy was to be considered and acted upon by the Church Council in Spring 2009 and be presented to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Strengthening commitment to the Middle East strategy: The ELCA was represented at ecumenical and inter-religious tables advocating with the federal government. Staff capacity was increased in the ELCA Washington Office to concentrate on Middle East advocacy. Forty-four bishops representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, including Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson and National Bishop Susan Johnson, visited the West Bank and Israel January 6–13, 2009. The bishops met with religious, political, and community leaders, and focused on support and encouragement for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Ministry policies: The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality is bringing a report and recommendations on ministry policies to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Global climate change: In Fall 2007, bishops were briefed on global warming and energy legislation. In 2008, staff advocated on the Senate version of energy legislation that included a provision to increase fuel economy in cars and trucks, thus reducing carbon emissions, and on a Senate global warming bill to help people in poverty adapt to rising energy costs. The ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility program engaged six companies in dialogue on policies and practices related to environmental and global warming.

Message on immigration: Work is in progress on a new message on immigration in order to ensure that ELCA policy reflects the critical and changing reality of this matter. The proposed message will be brought to the November 2009 Church Council meeting.

Major Directions for 2009–2011

Future directions for the Church in Society unit will aim at carrying out the ELCA Plan for Mission's strategic direction to "Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created" through:

- *awareness* that transforms knowledge and understanding into informed and faithful action in society;
- *accompaniment* that walks with neighbors, community, and society in mutually accountable relationships of support and challenge, engaging allies in an attitude of profound respect for each other's assets, values, and vulnerabilities; and
- *advocacy* that creates and uses political power to speak truth to power, to stand in solidarity with those in need, to represent and give voice to those without political voice, and to challenge church, society, and government.

In carrying out these goals, this unit will motivate and equip ELCA members and congregations, with special attention to synodical leaders, youth, and young adults.

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