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## Recommendations: Social Statement on Justice for Women

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### Background

The Plan for Mission supports the five strategic directions with the commitment to: "Confront the scandalous realities of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual, physical, personal, and class barriers that often manifest themselves in exclusion, poverty, hunger, and violence." Since the establishment of the ELCA in 1988, this church has demonstrated its commitment to justice for women both programmatically through the Commission for Women and throughout the whole organization. In 2005, in order to strengthen the engagement of all parts of the ELCA, the Churchwide Assembly approved a change in structure by which the Church in Society program unit would include a program for justice for women.

As an expression of the high commitment of this church to this work, all units include work for justice for women and are held accountable to the Office of the Presiding Bishop. In addition, because of the churchwide nature of this program, the director for justice for women reports annually to the Church Council and biennially to the Churchwide Assembly. The relevant continuing resolution [16.12.D06.d.] states that the Church in Society program unit shall:

. . . work to enable this church to realize the full participation of women; to create equal opportunity for women of all cultures; to foster partnership between men and women; to assist this church to address sexism; and to advocate for women in this church and society. In so doing, this program unit shall:

- 1) present a program plan annually to the Church Council and biennially to the Churchwide Assembly on these efforts; and
- 2) convene a consulting committee related to this task.

The Justice for Women consulting committee is composed of women and men from around the country representing a wide variety of ages, ethnicities, and vocational experiences. This group currently includes:

- April Almaas, at-large member, Harvard Divinity School graduate currently finishing a pastoral internship in the Sierra Pacific Synod;
- Susan Candea, at-large member, pastor of an ELCA congregation in Colorado;

- Antonia Clemente, at-large member, co-founder and executive director of a domestic violence center in New York City;
- Kris Kvam (*chair*), at-large member, professor at a Methodist seminary in Kansas City;
- Agnes McClain, at-large member, assistant to the bishop of the Southwest California Synod;
- Mikka McCracken, at-large member, student at Gustavus Adolphus College;
- A. J. Mell, advisory member, high school student in Pennsylvania;
- Joyce Schoulte, advisory member, representative of the Church in Society program committee from the Northeastern Iowa Synod;
- David Truland, advisory member, liaison from the Church Council;
- [*vacant*], advisory member, representative of the Conference of Bishops;
- Other advisory members include Wyvetta Bullock, executive for administration; Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director of Women of the ELCA; and Doug Haugen, director of Lutheran Men in Mission;
- Staff members from the Church in Society program unit include Rebecca Larson, executive director; Mary Streufert, director for justice for women; and Juli Bey, administrative assistant.

One of the main responsibilities of the consulting committee is to advise the director on priorities for implementing the Plan for Mission commitment to justice for women. In its work the consulting committee has identified as a priority the need for extensive engagement theologically throughout this church in order to understand and address effectively a variety of matters of critical concern to this church. These include but are not limited to the following:

- the reality of sexism as a sin in this world;
- the importance of claiming the work of justice for women (and girls) as the work of this entire church;
- the profound social and justice needs of women and girls in both church and society;
- the statistics on violence, poverty, HIV and AIDS, exclusion from and derision for ecclesial and secular leadership, and trafficking in humans overwhelmingly indicate the egregious harm women experience, both within church and within society;

- the unmet social and justice needs of women indicate that they are not valued as made in the image of God;
- the problems, which are systemic, relate to women and men and systems of power and privilege and must be addressed theologically; and
- this church is called to speak boldly and publically through advocacy and in other ways in support of justice for women (and girls) in church and society and requires a policy base to do this effectively and well.

The consulting committee concluded that the personal, social, and religious reality of injustice for women and girls demands a deeply convicted theological response that would engage this church in study and reflection, particularly on the theological connection between justification and justice in the realm of what it means to be female and male within God's creation. The consulting committee concluded that it is not until this important piece of work is engaged that this church can most effectively respond to issues of justice related to women and girls both within church and society.

Therefore, at its meeting in the fall of 2007 the consulting committee for justice for women recommended to the Church in Society program unit that a request be made to the Church Council to call for a social statement on justice for women. At its meeting in the spring of 2008, the program committee for Church in Society discussed this matter and supported the recommendation of the consulting committee.

## Social Statements

The "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns" describe social statements in this way: "Social statements are major documents addressing significant social issues. Typically, they provide an analysis and interpretation of an issue, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives related to it, and offer guidance for the corporate Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its individual members . . . . In all cases social statements are the product of extensive and inclusive deliberation within this church, a process that is an integral part of their educational purpose. Because of the considerable resources and care that this church invests in them, and because of the participatory process used in their development, social statements are the most authoritative form of social policy and are adopted only by the Churchwide Assembly."

Six perspectives guide this church's understanding, development, consideration, and use of social statements:

1. Social statements are theological documents.
2. Social statements are teaching documents.
3. Social statements involve this church in the ongoing task of theological ethics.
4. Social statements result from an extensive, inclusive and accepted process of deliberation throughout this church.
5. Social statements guide the institutional life of this church.
6. Social statements, intended to be used widely in the life and mission of this church, reflect awareness of the various audiences and ministries which they are to serve.

### *Church Council Action:*

At its meeting on November 14–17, 2008, the Church Council considered the recommendation from the Church in Society unit concerning development of a social statement on justice for women. It approved the following recommendation to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly [CC08.11.38]:

## **Recommendation for Assembly Action**

**To request that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America develop a social statement on the topic of justice for women in church and society to be received by the Churchwide Assembly for approval in 2015.**