

**Devotions – October 2-8, 2016**

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From the Lutheran Office of Public Policy Retreat

**Sunday, October 2, 2016**

**Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

**Our Calling in Education**

To find the full text of the Social Statement, go here:

<http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Education>.

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/OurCallinginEducationSS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=1.119352845.582352086.1450383200](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/OurCallinginEducationSS_Summary.pdf?_ga=1.119352845.582352086.1450383200).

**Scripture:**

The Creator gives us responsibility for the life and education of new generations and for making the earth a fitting home for human beings and other creatures (Genesis 1:26-28).

**Social Statement Tidbits:**

This social statement addresses this question: What does God have to do with education?

Education, as understood in this social statement, refers in a broad sense to learning, teaching, and knowing as a dimension of human life. It is a lifelong activity that permeates all that we do. In a narrower sense, education refers to intentional activity in which we engage one another in learning.

Education depends on and should reflect who people are as creatures of God. Humanity is one, and all are of equal worth before God. Education is always to respect the dignity we receive in being created in “the image of God”.

The ELCA lives its calling in education today in a world that is increasingly interconnected and in a society that is becoming more pluralistic. Contemporary culture brings new marvels yet also conveys messages that hinder learning and clash with the Church’s beliefs. Science and technology continuously reshape our world, bringing new benefits as well as new dangers and creating new moral dilemmas and theological challenges.

We pledge to sustain, renew, and where need be, reform our calling in education for the time and place so that we will be a stronger, livelier, and more faithful teaching and learning church. A teaching and learning church invites the baptized of all ages – from infants to older adults – into a continuous discipline of learning and faith formation.

The education of young people is a shared responsibility among parents, schools, religious bodies, and community.

**Questions:**

1. Does our congregation have a vibrant educational program for ALL ages of learners? What are we and our congregation doing to promote education within our church setting?
2. What resources does our congregation use in its educational ministry? Are we using the ELCA social statements as guidelines in that ministry?
3. Realizing that new forms of communicating information are available, how is our congregation using that technology in its educational ministry? Are we discerning users of that technology? Why or why not?

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, we are grateful that you have created us with ability to learn, teach and know. We pray that the Holy Spirit will sustain, renew, and transform us as we live our calling in education in this church and society with its many amazing opportunities and daunting challenges.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



**Monday, October 3, 2016**

**Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements****Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice**

To find the full text of the social statement, go here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS.pdf?\\_ga=1.147521843.582352086.1450383200](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS.pdf?_ga=1.147521843.582352086.1450383200).

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=1.186394797.582352086.1450383200](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS_Summary.pdf?_ga=1.186394797.582352086.1450383200).

**Scripture:**

The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are His. (Psalm 24:1)

**Social Statement Tidbits:**

Christian concern for the environment is shaped by the Word of God spoken in creation, the Love of God hanging on a cross, the Breath of God daily renewing the face of the earth.

Vision: Scripture witnesses to God as creator of the earth and all that dwells therein (Psalm 24:1)... Humanity is intimately related to the rest of creation. We, like other creatures, are formed from the earth (Genesis 2:7, 9, 19)... Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole creation. Made in the image of God we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth. God's command to have dominion and subdue the earth is not a license to dominate and exploit... Human dominion, a special responsibility, should reflect God's way of ruling as a shepherd king who takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7)... According to Genesis 2:15, our role within creation is to serve and to keep God's garden, the earth.

Urgency: Alienated from God and from creation, and driven to make a name for ourselves, we become captives to demonic powers and unjust institutions. In our captivity, we treat the earth as a boundless warehouse and allow the powerful to exploit its bounties to their own ends (Amos:5: 6-15). Our sin and captivity lie at the roots of the current crisis... The idea of the earth as a boundless warehouse has proven both false and dangerous. Damage to the environment eventually will affect most people through increased conflict over scarce resources, decline in food security, and greater vulnerability to disease.

Hope: By the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God frees us from our sin and captivity, and empowers us to be loving servants to creation.

Justice: Caring, serving, keeping, loving, and living by wisdom – these translate into justice in political, economic, social, and environmental relationships. Justice in these relationships means honoring the integrity of creation, and striving for fairness within the human family.

**Questions:**

1. Each congregation is encouraged to see itself as a center for exploring scriptural and theological foundations for caring for creation. Has our congregation been involved in relevant study and discussion? Why or why not?
2. In what ways can we as a congregation bring together people of various viewpoints to discuss the importance of caring for our environment?
3. Has our congregation taken steps to advocate for sustainability in our community? Can we consider working cooperatively with other congregations, organizations, businesses etc. to find ways to care for our environment?

**Prayer:**

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”



**Tuesday, October 4, 2016**

**Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

**The Death Penalty**

To find the full text of the social statement, go here:

<http://elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Death-Penalty;>

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243\)](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS_Summary.pdf?_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243)

**Scripture:**

Those who support the use of the death penalty often do so on the basis of Scripture, especially “you shall give life for life” (Exodus 21:23b) and “let every person be subject to the governing authorities...for the authority does not bear the sword in vain” (Romans 13:1-7; cf., 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Those who oppose the death penalty often do so on the basis of Scripture, arguing that Jesus in His teaching abolished the death penalty in the Law, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” (Matthew 5:38-39), and by example “When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her’.” (John 8:7).

### **Social Statement Tidbits:**

The human community is saddened by violence, and angered by the injustice involved. We want to hold accountable those who violate life, who violate society. Our sadness and anger, however, make us vulnerable to feelings of revenge. Our frustration with the complex problems contributing to violence may make us long for simple solutions.

On the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions we hold that, through the divine activity of the Law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world. God works through the state and other structures of society Necessary for life in the present age.

*It is because of this church’s ministry with and to people affected by violent crime that we oppose the death penalty.* Executions focus on the convicted murderer, providing very little for the victim’s family or anyone else whose life has been touched by the crime. Capital punishment focuses on retribution, sometimes reflecting a spirit of vengeance. Executions do not restore broken society and can actually work counter to restoration.

*It is because of this church’s commitment to justice that we oppose the death penalty.* Lutheran Christians have called for an assault on the root causes of violent crime, an assault in which executions are no substitute.

### **Questions:**

1. What are the root causes of violent crime and how do we address them?
2. How is the criminal justice system connected to other areas of concern to the church such as racism, poverty, abuse, and chemical dependency?
3. Does Capital punishment act as a deterrent?

### **Prayer:**

Merciful Father, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for those impacted by the death penalty.

We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

We pray for those on death row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion.

We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land.

Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and to build a society that truly chooses life in all situations. We ask this Father through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.



**Wednesday, October 5, 2016**

## **Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

### **For Peace in God's World**

To find the full text of the social statement, go here:

<http://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>.

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS_Summary.pdf?_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243))

### **Scripture:**

Romans15:33; 16:20; 1Corinthians14:33; 2Corinthians13:11; Philippians4:9; 1

Thessalonians5:23; 2Thessalonians3:16; Hebrews13:20; Colossians1:15-20; Philippians2:10-11;

Romans8:19-25; 1Corinthians15:23-25.

### **Social Statement Tidbits:**

Most importantly, this statement recalls that the basis of the Church's peace-calling is in God's final peace, the peace of God's eternal reign. That calling is to proclaim the Gospel of God's final peace and to work for earthly peace. This statement understands earthly peace to mean relationships among and within nations that are just, harmonious, and free from war.

This reconciling love of enemy discloses how deeply peace is rooted in who God is. The cross of Christ enacts God's resolve for peace once-for-all.

By equipping the faithful to act for peace in all their communities, the Church contributes to earthly peace. In recalling our identity in baptism, in gathering in peace around the Lord's Table, in telling the biblical narrative, in teaching faith, hope, and love, the Church provides the basics of peacemaking for all of life.

As a reconciling presence, the Church creates bonds among different peoples, whether local or distant. It has special opportunities to bring conflicting parties together and to keep tenuous lines of communication open during times of crisis and war. The Church serves reconciliation by countering religious movements—including ones claiming to be Christian that preach and practice hate and violence, by challenging stereotypes of "the enemy," and by encouraging imaginative solutions to conflicts.

In the cross we recognize that forgiveness, reconciliation, and love of enemy are essential to our efforts to build earthly peace.

**Questions:**

1. What role do you understand the church to have in working toward a peaceful world?
2. Should or will the increasingly connected world make peace more attainable?
3. As citizens what responsibility do we have in the political arena to resist war and violence?

**Prayer:** Lord, we are deeply aware of the tragic cycle of continuing violence around the world, as tragedy and suffering have occurred to so many people now and throughout history. Give us strength, O God, to constrain our might, to resist the temptations of power, to refuse to attack the attackable, to understand that vengeance begets violence, and to bring peace--not war--wherever we go. Amen.



**Thursday, October 6, 2016**

**Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

**Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture**

To find the full text of the social statement, go here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?\\_ga=1.90615834.1294600624.1453157147](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?_ga=1.90615834.1294600624.1453157147);

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Freed In Christ Race Ethnicity Culture BriefSummary.pdf?\\_ga=1.1421745.1294600624.1453157147](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Freed%20In%20Christ%20Race%20Ethnicity%20Culture%20BriefSummary.pdf?_ga=1.1421745.1294600624.1453157147)

**Scripture:**

The Church confesses Christ, who has broken down the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14). The Church looks toward the freedom of the reign of God, announced by and embodied in Jesus. But Christians live between the “now” of the reign of God and the “not yet” of its fulfillment. Trusting the promise of freedom, we can face the fact that each of us is captive, each of us is in bondage to sin (1 John 1:8).

**Social Statement Tidbits:**

- Racism — a mix of power, privilege and prejudice — is sin, a violation of God’s intention for humanity.
- The ELCA is in mission in a multicultural society and has made commitments to welcome cultural diversity.
- Those with access to opportunities, power and institutions remain separate from those without such access, whose cultures often have been ridiculed and reviled, or destroyed. The ELCA expects our leadership to name the sin of racism and lead us in our repentance.
- Participation in public life is essential to doing justice. The ELCA encourages public witness and insists on a public forum accessible to everyone.

- The ELCA received from its predecessor church bodies a solid foundation for advocacy. Advocacy will look for change and fair distribution of the social costs of correcting past wrongs. Advocacy will work for respect of cultures and oppose language-based discrimination.

- The ELCA will support legislation that guarantees to all individuals equally: civil rights; access to quality education, health care, and nutrition; opportunity for employment with fair compensation; opportunity for business ownership; access to legal, banking, and insurance services; the right to purchase housing in any place; and access to public transportation.

- The ELCA will promote international respect for human rights, and support the international movement to eliminate discrimination.

#### **Questions:**

- When have you been encouraged or inspired by the “Black Lives Matter” movement? When has this movement been troubling or difficult to receive?
- How could the government be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?
- How could the church be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?
- How could you be most helpful in addressing racial/ethnic wrongs?

#### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, you are the God of All Creation. Help us to be good neighbors and joyful advocates for all people, of all backgrounds. You love all that you have made. Help us to do the same. Amen.



**Friday, October 7, 2016**

#### **Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

##### **Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**

To find the full text of the social statement, go here:

<http://elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexuality>;

A summary is available here:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS_Summary.pdf?_ga=1.127852429.1854034983.1440515243))

#### **Scripture:**

Invited to answer the question, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answered, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36–40).

#### **Social Statement Tidbits:**

This social statement addresses the question: how do we understand human sexuality within the context of Jesus' invitation to love God and love our neighbor (Romans 13:9–10; Galatians 5:14)?

No relationships or social structures can thrive in the absence of trust. Two such foundational social structures are marriage and the family. Lutherans believe that God works through these structures for the good of society.

The statement attempts to lay a Lutheran foundation for thinking about love of God and neighbor, honoring creation and the body, the gift of family as a vocation and experience of God's grace, and the necessity to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation.

When it comes to the question of same-gender relationships, the statement acknowledges that several (four, in particular) convictions exist among the people of the ELCA; each of these convictions are informed by biblical and theological reflection; and while we are not of one mind, we commit ourselves to honoring the conscience-bound convictions of others. As such, different congregations will make different choices regarding how to relate to people in same-gender relationships with whom they are in ministry – and we do not expect all congregations to have the same practices and policies in this regard.

**Questions:**

1. What issues of sexuality and family are of most concern to you? What does it mean to speak about those issues as a person of faith?
2. What can and/or should the church be doing to help people of all ages have healthy, life-giving intimate/sexual lives that honor God and neighbor?
3. When have you been challenged by loving someone with whom you fundamentally disagree on an issue that is important to you? How can you honor the "bound conscience" of that person while also holding onto your own convictions?

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, you came among us – as one of us – to show us the way to abundant life. Help us to confront the things that take life away from us and our neighbors. Help us to celebrate the gifts you have given that lead us into life. Help us to celebrate family and relationship, while we also walk with those for whom love is a stranger. Help us to love one another, even and especially when we disagree. In Jesus' Name. Amen.



**Saturday, October 8, 2016**

**Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements**

***Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All***

**Scripture:**

Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me."

Matthew 6:24c "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Matthew 6:11 “Give us this day our daily bread.”

**Social Statement Tidbits:**

- Christian vocation is our freedom, through the gospel, to serve others through our earthly responsibilities such as family, work and community life. “Livelihood” refers to our economic support system. The relationships and structures that support livelihood teach important virtues. As a church the ELCA commits to and urges its members to support and encourage the living out of daily callings in order to serve the neighbor (including the wider society) while trusting in God’s providential care.
- “Sufficiency” means being able to meet basic needs. God created a world that has enough for all, but it needs to be shared and distributed justly in order to be enough for all. Huge disparities in wealth threaten the integrity of the human community. Property does not ultimately belong to us under a biblical understanding of stewardship. The ELCA commits to providing for people in need and calls for the government to provide for people in need or who are unable to provide for their livelihood through employment.
- Consumerism causes us to confuse what we want with what we need. Possessions and wealth can become our gods. The gulf between the pay of top corporate officers and average workers is scandalous. Transnational corporations, wielding great economic power, should be held accountable for the sake of all.
- “Sustainability” is the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term. We are moved by Scripture to focus on the long term and respect the integrity and limits of creation. Humans have treated the earth as something to be used rather than the finite, fragile ecological system upon which life depends. We confess our mistreatment of the environment, and believe that economic processes should respect environmental limits.

**Questions:**

1. What issues of economic justice are of the most concern to you? What does it mean to speak about those issues as a person of faith?
2. Have you or someone you care about had economic struggles? How does this affect your thoughts on economic justice?
3. How does the First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” shape your understanding of personal and societal economic life?
4. How does the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us today our daily bread,” shape your understanding of personal and societal economic life?

**Prayer:**

Sing or pray verses 1-2 “We Give Thee but Thine Own” #410 LBW, #686 ELW

