

LENT

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Speaking to Sin

Lutheran Church of the Resurrection

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HUMAN RIGHTS

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and yes - the Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of the earth. Genesis 1:26

CONTEXT OF ELCA VIEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS:

A right is what justice requires in response to a particular human need. Adapted from this church's historical body of social teaching, the ELCA affirms the following broad categories of human rights:

1. Humans have been created for divine relationship and have the right to engage in that relationship through such means as worship and devotional practices.
2. Humans are creatures and creators of symbol and meaning and have the right to think and communicate freely and to be educated.
3. Humans are communal beings and have the right to the protection of foundational relationships, such as marriage and family. No one has the right to sunder or violate fundamental communal relationships or turn them into a commodity.
4. Humans are political and civic beings and have the right to equal access and participation in legal, civic and political decisions affecting them.
5. Humans are economic beings and have the right to participate fully in an economy where resources are justly allocated with a view to sustainability. Humans may not be treated as commodities.
6. Humans are physical beings and have the right to sufficient and sustainable levels of physical goods such as water, food, shelter and health care. This includes treating creation sustainably so the next generation has sufficient physical goods.

These principles guide our Corporate and Individual discernment and involvement:

The principle of sufficiency means meeting the basic needs of all humanity and all creation.

- The principle of sustainability means providing an acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations.
- The principle of participation means all are entitled to be heard and to have their interests considered when decisions are made.
- The principle of solidarity means that we stand together with all of God's creation.

On the basis of ELCA teaching and in light of contemporary needs, the ELCA will:

- advocate for the U.S. government to protect and promote the equal rights of all people, as enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights;
- uphold and foster human rights as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- support international organizations such as the United Nations, including its Security Council and Human Rights Council, and the International Labor Organization in working to develop and safeguard human rights;
- encourage the United States to fund the United Nations in proportion to its economic strength;
- support the Responsibility to Protect³¹ movement when it anticipates and protects against serious rights violations;
- support the aims of the Right to Development³² as expressed in the U.N. General Assembly Resolution of December 1986;
- encourage governments and corporations to uphold the United Nations' Protect, Respect and Remedy framework and guiding principles;
- advocate for the United States to ratify international treaties and agreements that protect human rights;
- be sensitive to the needs of indigenous peoples, whose understandings of ownership, culture and community may be at odds with corporate notions of ownership – corporations and governments do not possess the absolute right to ignore those perspectives;
- practice accompaniment in its advocacy on human rights; and
- provide members, congregations and other ELCA entities the resources needed to deepen their understanding of and commitment to promoting human rights.

CONCLUSION

Christians are realistic about rampant abuses of human rights, which are evidence of the reality of sin. Yet they remain convinced that God's creative activity both bestows human dignity on every person and urges courage and action in times such as these. Empowered by hope in the God who raised the crucified Jesus from the dead as a sign of God's ultimate victory, this church is freed to acknowledge failures and take up responsibility as individuals and in corporate witness. By

means of this message, the ELCA recommits itself to the cause of human rights. The ELCA will support domestic and international human rights institutions, foster deliberation, and engage in sustained action that seek rights for any neighbors – especially the vulnerable – who are not being treated with the dignity that is God's gift.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

The social message on “Gender-based Violence” seeks to raise awareness about the growing level of gender-based violence in U.S. Society. “Gender-based violence” includes, but is not limited to, rape, sexual abuse, physical and sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and sexual harassment. The message was developed in light of existing ELCA social teaching documents such as statements on race, ethnicity, and culture and sexuality; the message on commercial sexual exploitation and the policy resolution on domestic violence.

Gender-based violence is an ancient sin that for thousands of years has harmed countless women, children and men. It is a sin that Christians need to recognize, understand and confront, for our religious history also bears its stain. The story from II Samuel 13 is a case in point.

WHAT MIGHT THIS CHURCH SAY PASTORALLY? This church includes survivors, bystanders and perpetrators. Gender-based violence affects each differently—some with the terror of being hurt, some with the fear that comes from seeing or hearing about violence, and some with the brokenness of those who do violence to others.

Our bodies, hearts and minds are beloved by a gracious God who created each person in God's own image (Genesis 1:27) and redeemed us through Christ. God weeps with us because we hurt and betray each other. The body of Christ is wounded and longs for healing.

Words and acts of healing and reconciliation will be different for different people and circumstances. What is not different is each person's need for God's grace. Through words of pastoral care, this church, made of those who, at the same time, are both saints and

sinner, can speak by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Although specific actions will take shape differently among individuals, congregations, church leaders, social ministry organizations, and church-related institutions or other agencies of this church, there are common aims.

- Recognize, name and root out the violence and its sources wherever it is happening.
- Ensure care and create safe communities that foster healing.
- Provide education.
- Create accountability.

Advocacy and action will take shape differently when directed toward a local organization, a local community, or the state or federal sphere. They will be different when sought by individual Christians as citizens than when sought through the ELCA's various institutional efforts as a public church. Yet the common aim is to participate in robust advocacy and action that fosters safe and healthy communities. This church is encouraged to:

- Become allies with others.
- Seek improved laws and social patterns.
- Challenge organizations and agencies to adopt and use policies and practices that prevent and reduce gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION: As God's church we are David, Amnon, Absalom and Tamar. Like King David, we have the means to intervene. Like Amnon, we commit gender-based violence. Like Absalom, we both silence victims and are tempted to retaliate with further violence. Like Tamar, we are targets of violence and try to resist it.

This is the time to speak and to listen, to deeply and honestly know the pain in the body of Christ and throughout the world. This is the time for survivors to speak and to be heard. This is the time to break the silence. This is the time to respond with wisdom and compassion through action and words. This is the time to wisely care for perpetrators and to hold them accountable.

This is the time to change policies, strengthen laws and challenge systemic factors that create and foster gender-based violence. This is the time to transform negative religious influences and to improve prevention and response within this church.

The evil of gender-based violence necessitates different kinds of efforts from congregations, leaders, synods, the churchwide organization, and church-related social ministries and educational

institutions—and it pleads for a collective response.

May the triune God empower and direct us to name the problems, ensure wise care, provide education, create accountability, and become courageous and wise allies in creating safe and healthy communities.

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The social message on “Commercial Sexual Exploitation” seeks to raise awareness of an industry that sexually exploits vulnerable people, especially women and girls. The message addresses the businesses of prostitution, pornography and stripping, among other activities of exploitation, that are built on the exchange of money for sexual activity. It highlights the system of sexual exploitation as a manifestation of social sin. Turning sex into a commodity magnifies the social injustices that undermine human dignity and tends to dominate people who are created in the image of God.

This message calls us to engage in many forms of action to curb sex trafficking, challenge major corporations that profit from pornography and give particular attention to preventing youth from becoming captives and victims of sexual exploitation.

“Sexual Exploitation in any situation, either personally or commercially, inside or outside legally contracted marriage, is sinful because it is destructive of God's good gift [of sexuality] and human integrity.” Commercial sexual exploitation is an organized form of this sinful behavior. It is especially demonic when it exploits children and youth. Commercial sexual exploitation is widespread throughout the United States and around the world, and it continues to grow. To a large extent, this exploitation remains hidden from public attention and ignored by church and society. It includes what customers do by:

- viewing pornographic videos
- downloading pornography from the Internet
- visiting strip clubs
- engaging in simulated sex by phone or computer
- using escort services
- participating in sex tourism

While customers may think they harm no one but themselves, the truth is that they are swept up in a sex system that degrades all participants, both providers and customers. With this message, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America hopes to raise awareness of the industry that sexually exploits vulnerable

persons, principally women and girls, but also men and boys. It calls upon members to examine how this industry might affect their lives. The council urges members, congregations, synods, churchwide units, and affiliated agencies and institutions to renew their care and concern for children and youth, recognizing that there are those who prey upon young persons in their dependency and vulnerability. Love born of faith in Jesus Christ calls us all to attend to, discuss, resist, and change the system of commercial sexual exploitation.

A TANGLED WEB

Even a glimpse of the sex system makes evident that this is not the way life is supposed to be. Sin is the proper term for speaking of what has gone profoundly wrong in God's good creation. Sin is an intruder in creation, resisting and distorting God's intention for human community. Sin is both personal and social. It finds a home deep in the human heart, turning us in on ourselves and away from God and others, and takes on a life of its own in our social structures. Let us not blink at, gloss over, trivialize, or accommodate ourselves to the sinful evil of the sex system. It is social sin, a structure of evil that shapes and snares persons, and to which personal attitudes, decisions, and acts contribute. In its tangled web, we see the dynamics of sin at work.

Persons become objects to be used for the benefit of others. The sex system denies the human dignity bestowed by God on all. This denial is most blatant in sex trafficking, a form of slavery driven by greed in which captured persons become property, a mere extension of the will of the owner. Yet using persons as objects characterizes all parts of the system: For predators, owners, and managers of the system, “their” children and adults are instruments for generating income; for sellers, “johns” or buyers are objects for gaining money or favor with their pimps; and for customers, sellers are “pieces of meat” to satisfy their every want.

Sex turns into a commodity. The sex system corrupts God's wonderful gift of sexuality by reducing it to a marketable item. It rips sex out of the mutual relationships of trust, love, and equality intended by God and mocks the faithful, caring, life-long marital context for sexual intimacy. Those who sell sex use their bodies for sex they do not want, seeking only the money, gifts, drugs, or shelter they receive in payment. To survive they dissociate their business transactions from the rest of their identity. As their sexuality becomes a separate reality from who they are as persons, many face the threat of personal disintegration

and its life-long effects.

Lust plays its role. The sex system creates the illusion of endless sexual opportunity. This system, which depends on the power of lust to move customers to purchase its products, does what it can to stimulate and manipulate this disordered desire, which is often bound up with emotional and relational problems. Sexual desire and appreciation for the beauty of the human body, part of the goodness of creation, bring joy and delight to human life. Sexual desire becomes lust when it breaks loose from our relationship with God and longs for fulfillment in the false god of sexual pleasure. Lust — an insatiable, unlimited desire to possess, to indulge, to take pleasure — enslaves and contributes to compulsive, addictive behavior.

Persons dominate women and youth. The sex system uses women and girls, young men and boys, to pleasure chiefly men. Strip clubs, organized according to unequal gender power dynamics, elicit and require expressions of male domination and control of women, which society often encourages of men. Pimps and customers, even police at times, abuse, assault, and threaten women, girls, and boys in prostitution with violence and death, and take advantage of their vulnerabilities to subject them to domination. Those who pay usually dictate what sexual acts their provider must perform. Much of the sex system lives from and reinforces culture's deeply ingrained attitudes and power patterns that assume that women and children are not fully and equally human and are meant to be subservient to others. The sex system actualizes a world of exploiters and the exploited, often incorporating the exploitation of racism and social-economic class. Prostitution, it is said, is the world's oldest form of oppressing women. The same dynamic of oppression is at work when adults make young men and boys their hired sexual objects.

Deceit reigns. The sex system from beginning to end is built on deceit. God gives humans abilities to communicate in order to speak the truth and form community, but the sex system twists these abilities in order to beguile and trick. Predators, including sex traffickers, make false promises to, and create illusory futures for, their prospective women; women deceive their consumers about how pleasurable it is; and customers hide or lie about what they have done. Strippers dupe their viewers with an air of artificial enjoyment, and pornographic stars fake sexual pleasure. Escort services claim to offer only non-sexual dates, and illicit massage parlors claim to be health services.

Misery abounds. The sex system depends on and magnifies human misery. Sex traffickers buy and steal women and children from poor families with limited options, and pimps find likely prospects in girls who have been abused as children by their fathers or other relatives. The need to support drug or alcohol addictions leads many into prostitution; others later become addicted to cope with the emptiness of constantly selling themselves; but almost all are addicted to drugs or alcohol. Diseases — sexually transmitted and other physical, psychological, and spiritual ones — take their toll; early death — sometimes by murder, sometimes by suicide — is common. Forced retirement without pension comes early, and women without skills and possibly with a police record must fend for themselves. Families and loved ones of persons in the sex system experience untold suffering, and children of prostitutes suffer consequences from their mothers' involvement in this tangled web, often becoming a part of the sex system themselves. Men with emotional or relational problems who are drawn into the sex system often find that their false and momentary pleasure deepens their problems, pushes them further away from their families, and compounds their pain. The sex system is not “victimless.”

Evil masquerades as good. To do its evil, the sex system strives to look good. It tells itself and the world that it is only providing goods and services that consumers want. It is only promoting business transactions between consenting adults. There are abuses, it may admit, but they are marginal to the industry as a whole. Apologists try to make the case that their enterprises are “normal mainstream” businesses, insisting that all are entitled “to do their own thing.” In such ways the sex system weaves the threads of self-deception and self-justification into its tangled web of sin and evil.

Young persons and children cry out. The sex system irresistibly entraps youth and children, girls and boys. It does not rest content with exploiting adults' vulnerabilities, but also takes advantage of those of young age. Driven in part by the (false) belief that younger persons are less likely to have sexually transmittable diseases, it seeks out ever younger victims. All youth and children are gifts of God, dependent on parents and family for care and nurture and on society for protection as they grow into adulthood. Their sexual exploitation for profit reveals the demonic depth of the sex system.

Equip the Saints

Find out what is happening in your community

Prevent youth from becoming captives of the sex system.

Address the demand for what the sex industry offers.

Explore the law's role.

Examine your spending and investments.

Support social agencies that work with youth and adults who are in prostitution.

Curb sex trafficking.

IMMIGRATION

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Matthew 25:35

The social message on "Immigration" presents basic themes for discernment on questions of immigration that our society is facing. It draws from Scripture and the experience of Lutherans in America as an immigrant church in a country of immigrants. The basic themes are grounded in the call to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35) together with the commitment to justice that advocates for fair and generous laws.

We recognize and rejoice in diversity; we recognize the obstacles and difficulties in welcoming newcomers.

The leaders and congregations that have given us this legacy remind us that hospitality for the uprooted is a way to live out the biblical call to love the neighbor in response to God's love in Jesus Christ. They recall for us God's command to Israel: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:34).⁴ They direct us to where Jesus said he is present: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25: 35). They call on Martin Luther to ask us: "How do we know that the love of God dwells in us? If we take upon ourselves the need of the neighbor." Our desire is to carry on their faith and practice, their exemplary way of faith being active in love. "We pledge to continue our church's historic leadership in caring for refugees and immigrants."

Newcomers without legal documents also are among the most vulnerable. Congregations are called to welcome all people, regardless of their legal status. Persons who once were or now are without documents are members of our congregations, and we want them to feel and know that in the Church they are part of a safe and caring community. We encourage bishops and synods to show their

support for congregations composed of or working with immigrants—who may or may not have documents.

Immigration, refugee, and asylum policies express who we are as a nation, influence the nation's future character, and affect the lives of millions of people. We encourage our members, in light of our history and our ministry with newcomers, to join with other citizens in our democratic society to support just laws that serve the common good. Our advocacy needs to take into account the complexity of issues, the diversity of interests, and the partial or relative justice of laws at the same time that it counters appeals rooted in hostility, racism, prejudice, indifference, and simplistic solutions. We draw on the best of our nation's traditions as a refuge and haven for the persecuted and destitute when we affirm that “we support a generous policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants,” and that we “will advocate for just immigration policies, including fairness in visa regulations and in admitting and protecting refugees. We will work for policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them.”

The following objectives, set forth in a 1969 statement of the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, have been important for Lutheran church bodies and organizations for nearly forty years and have given content to our understanding of fair and generous immigration laws:

1. To admit to our permanent population a steady proportion of newcomers:
 - a. by facilitating the reunification of families;
 - b. by facilitating the entry of persons possessing special skills or other capacities needed by the American economy and culture;
 - c. by assuming the United States' proper share of international responsibility for the resettlement of refugees and other persons urgently in need of the compassionate haven of a new home land; Our advocacy needs to be accompanied by continuing study. A comprehensive resource for pastors, seminary students, teachers, and other leaders in the church is Dana W. Wilbanks, *Recreating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
 - d. by admitting persons who choose the United States as their new homeland and who impart to their American neighbors an understanding of the culture, attitude, and interests of other races and peoples of the world.

2. To admit annually a reasonable number of the persons described above on an objective basis of selection which, while discriminating, will not be discriminatory with respect to race, national origin, color, or religion, testifying thereby to the United States' recognition of the interlocking and mutual interests of all nations with regard to the migration of peoples, the interaction of cultures, and respect of universal human rights.
3. To provide reasonable access to nationality and citizenship for all immigrants admitted for permanent residence.

With this understanding Lutheran advocacy supported the landmark 1965 immigration law that ended the four-decade-old quota system of admitting immigrants on the basis of their national origin and race. In place of that earlier policy that favored European nations, Lutheran advocacy supports the concept of one variable cap for immigrants that in principle gives residents of all nations equal opportunity to immigrate. (In 1998 that cap is set at approximately 900,000 people.) Our advocacy will continue to insist that family reunification should be the primary objective of immigration laws. It will oppose efforts to reduce the percentage of people admitted for family reunification reasons as well as costly financial requirements that prohibit immigrants with limited resources from being reunited with family members. It also will oppose policies and practices that actively recruit workers from developing countries to their detriment and to our country's benefit.

Among the many issues related to immigration policy, we highlight the following areas of concern where we think our country's laws can and should be improved:

- *Facilitating citizenship:* We welcome the desire of immigrants to become citizens. We advocate for Congress to provide the necessary resources and direction for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to ensure a reasonable, effective, and short process for citizenship. We call on the Department of Justice (DOJ) to address the backlog of applications and the lengthy wait and unnecessary administrative hassles many immigrants endure. We support the USCIS in its efforts to develop a climate of service for its clientele.
- *Benefits for lawful permanent residents:* Although Congress has restored some benefits for legal immigrants who arrived before 1996, more should be done. The denial of benefits to permanent residents favors wealthier immigrants and creates unwarranted

barriers for poorer ones. Most permanent residents are an integral part of our society who abide by the law, pay Social Security and taxes, and contribute to the economic and cultural life of their communities. In order to help assure their well-being, especially of their children, we support legislation that gives them access to the same benefits citizens receive.

- *Newcomers without legal status:* While most newcomers are legal permanent residents or naturalized citizens, a significant number of people, including many agricultural workers, lack legal documents. Many undocumented persons have been here for years. They live under the fear of deportation. Those who become eligible to adjust their status are only allowed to do so by leaving the United States and then waiting years to reenter. They often fear returning to a troubled land, and if they were to return, it would mean for many indefinite separation from their families in the United States. The existence of a permanent sub-group of people who live without recourse to effective legal protection opens the door for their massive abuse and exploitation and harms the common good. We urge leaders and citizens to seek feasible responses to this situation that offer flexible and humane ways for undocumented persons who have been in this country for a specified amount of time to be able to adjust their legal status.
- *Refugee policy:* Although there are tens of millions of refugees throughout the world, the number admitted into the United States has been decreasing. We believe that our country has a responsibility to increase the number of refugees it admits. We also are concerned that race not be a prejudicial factor in decisions about resettlement, and we urge our government to do more to provide African refugees a fair opportunity to be resettled. (For help in your advocacy, ask to be placed on the mailing lists of the ELCA Advocacy Network, LIRS's "Action Alert", and your state's public policy office. Contact your synod office for phone numbers in our country.) We also support fair and compassionate legislative solutions to the precarious plight of refugees whose present temporary legal status is threatened.
- *Asylum:* We advocate for a reliable, consistent, and sensitive implementation of the law governing asylum seekers. At present immigration judges treat similar cases in vastly different ways. We oppose practices that create unreasonable obstacles and unattainable standards of proof for those seeking asylum. We support efforts to ensure that due process is followed and that the conditions of detention are humane. We call upon The Department

of Homeland Security (DHS) to recognize the particular vulnerabilities of children by developing child-appropriate standards and procedures. We encourage that agency vigorously to use the channels of communication it has developed with refugee organizations to improve processes and conditions for asylum seekers.

- *Border with Mexico:* We recognize the right of all countries to control their borders and their duty to protect their citizens from the illegal entry of drugs and criminals. But we have serious doubts about the rightness and effectiveness of current policy to erect imposing barriers between the United States and Mexico. We support the search for alternatives to this policy that would more appropriately reflect the relationship of two friendly nations whose peoples and economies are increasingly interdependent. Whatever the policy, border enforcement should always respect the human dignity of persons attempting to cross the border. The newcomers in our church from around the world remind us that all of us in the Church of Jesus Christ are sojourners, *“for here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come”* (Hebrews 13: 14). As we journey together through the time God has given us, may God give us the grace of a welcoming heart and an overflowing love for the new neighbors among us.

This message was approved by the Board of the Division for Church in Society and was adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on November 16, 1998.

TERRORISM

“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Romans 5:1

The social message on “Living in a Time of Terrorism” was developed in the early years of the 21st century as acts of terrorism reached haunting proportions throughout the world. Drawing on the social statement “For Peace in God’s World,” the ELCA Church Council adopted this message as a means to facilitate thoughtful discussion in congregations and to encourage members to participate in civic deliberation as citizens. It is a resource for reflection on such questions as:

What is terrorism?

In light of our faith, how should we oppose terrorism?

What are the responsibilities and limits of government for earthly peace and security?

What gives rise to terrorism?

How does our faith address the fear that terrorism causes?

Through this message, we encourage people, congregations and communities to talk together about what it means to be peacemakers in a time of terrorism and to take part in the ongoing public discussion on terrorism, security and peace.

Terrorism haunts our times. People throughout the world live with frightening memories of terrorist attacks and with the uncertainties of possible future attacks. Terrorist networks continue to operate in many countries, some with ability to strike far from their home base. While terrorism has a long history, its threat to peace has intensified in our time. On September 11, 2001, when the world was again shaken by terrorism's murderous destruction and its ability to terrorize millions, the United States experienced its own vulnerability to international terrorism. The attacks of that day can only be condemned.

“We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America share with the Church of Jesus Christ in all times and places the calling to be peacemakers.” This opening sentence in the ELCA social statement “For Peace in God's World” reminds us that in these times also God calls us “to proclaim the Gospel of God's final peace and to work for earthly peace.” This message draws on that social statement to give a theological perspective on earthly peace, recall the role of governments, call for public vigilance of counterterrorism and for international cooperation, affirm the Gospel's gift of living beyond fear, and highlight the importance of interfaith encounters.

EARTHLY PEACE:

In light of the Gospel's promise of peace, Christians recognize both the goodness and limits of earthly peace. Earthly peace is not the same as the promised peace of God's present and future eternal reign. As a human achievement built in the middle of strife, earthly peace is often fleeting and always partial. It is difficult to build and maintain. It is easily and frequently disrupted by violence and war. All the more, then, is earthly peace a most precious gift. It embodies God's intention for creation, serves human and planetary good, and gives space to proclaim the Gospel, keeping hope in God alive. This distinction between God's eternal reign of peace and earthly peace offers perspective for approaching terrorism. Terrorism threatens earthly peace, not the peace given in the Gospel. The struggle against terrorism belongs to earthly peace and shares its

characteristics. This struggle is not a matter of God's ultimate salvation, which God has already secured for us and for all creation in the cross of Christ. It will not end sin and evil or bring about God's reign of peace. Our task is rather to restrain destructive acts and promote just peace among finite, sinful human beings within the constraints of our historical context. Because earthly peace is a precious yet fragile good, there is reason for all to be vigilant, self-critical, and active in preventing and suppressing terrorism, holding terrorists accountable, and addressing what gives rise to terrorism. Complacency and wishful thinking endanger peace; pride and self-righteousness endanger peace as well. In pursuing earthly peace, we must make judgments about good and evil, recognizing that we make them as sinful human beings who are accountable to God for our judgments. Terrorist acts are rightly called "evil," and the cause to protect innocent people from them is good and worthy. Yet counterterrorism should not be seen as the righteous waging a holy war against God's enemies, even when terrorists may understand themselves to be fighting a holy war. Religious leaders and others who criticize counterterrorism measures need to resist the temptation to be self-righteous in their judgments. "Because all are sinners before God, efforts to build earthly peace must recognize sin's persistent, pervasive, and subtle power. We easily deceive ourselves about our own righteousness. Even our best intentions can produce harmful results." Acting in a good cause does not mean being free from sin. We act "knowing what we do or do not do falls short of what love requires. No matter what conscientious people decide, they remain under God's judgment and in need of God's mercy given in the cross of Christ." Living in forgiveness encourages a spirit of humility, which recognizes legitimate disagreements about counterterrorism as well as the burdens and risks that decision-makers face before an uncertain future.

The Role of Governments

Terrorism may be understood as violence or the threat of violence directed toward civilians to create a climate of fear and uncertainty. State actors use terror to maintain their grip on power. Non-state actors use terror to disrupt a political, social, or economic order. Terrorism is political violence. It is planned and organized violence that aims to undermine a society's civic peace. Terrorists kill and injure civilians in order to generate fear and panic in society. Because terrorists aim to influence an audience, "terrorism is theatre" and terrorism is "propaganda by deed." According to both international law

and the just war tradition, some political violence may be justified (like wars of self-defense), while other political violence is not (like wars of aggression). The principles for deciding about wars include right intention, justifiable cause, legitimate authority, last resort, declaration of war aims, proportionality, and reasonable chance of success. The principles for conducting war include noncombatant immunity and proportionality. By these principles, terrorism is one kind of unjustifiable political violence. Just as human rights laws and just war principles condemn violent acts by a state to terrorize its people, so the same standards condemn terrorist acts by nonstate actors. Many such terrorist acts fail to meet any of the just war standards. Even when the terrorists' cause is viewed as just, terrorism cannot be justified because it intentionally targets noncombatants. Few people claim to be terrorists; yet if they intentionally kill or threaten to harm civilians to generate fear in order to disrupt a social order, they are terrorists. Lawful governments are authorized by God to protect society and secure the blessings of just order. Without minimal civic peace, people cannot carry on their daily activities that allow life to go on or attain the benefits of a just society. "We also advocate an earthly peace that provides security from violence and aggression, seeks just order in place of tyranny or anarchy, checks unrestrained power, and defends and enhances the life of people who are poor and powerless."

Governments often abuse and violate their authority under the guise of seeking security. They may deny the rightful aspirations of an oppressed group, violate human rights, or inflict their own unjustifiable violence on people in the name of fighting terrorism. They may use terror to guard the interests of an elite ruling group instead of protecting the security of all citizens. In their counterterrorism activity, governments have the obligation to adhere to basic human rights, the rule of law, and just war standards. The security that governments—including that of the United States—can provide from the threats of terrorism has limits. Human beings, finite creatures that we are, are always vulnerable; eliminating vulnerability would also do away with freedom. Governments cannot provide perfect or total security; when they claim or seek to do so, they become agents of arrogant pride and the injustice and insecurity that flow from pride. If they are to secure freedom for vulnerable people, governments must recognize their limits in providing security.

Public Vigilance and International Cooperation

Different perceptions of the nature and seriousness of the threat of

terrorism are often a major reason for disagreements within and among nations on what should be done in response to it. Faith provides perspective in approaching terrorism, but it does not give Christians or the Church special knowledge or competence in evaluating this threat. Like other concerned citizens, Christians must rely on others—terrorism analysts, government, media, international voices—for information in forming judgments about the threat of terrorism. The credibility of such individuals and institutions depends on their provision of trustworthy information and unbiased interpretations to the public. Assessing the reliability and significance of the information and interpretations, however, belongs the responsibility of citizens. Careful and critical public discussion is essential to sort out truth from deceit and genuine security concerns from self-serving manipulation. Policy makers face risky and difficult decisions in calculating what kind of security is either too little or too much, determining priorities and allocating expenditures, and balancing security with other responsibilities of government. Public scrutiny is needed to ensure that the costs and burdens of security measures are shared fairly and that the needs of people who are poor and marginalized are met. Continuing public vigilance is essential to evaluate whether or not the security measures are needed, effective, and, above all, respectful of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and in accord with the best of our country's traditions. Security measures and practices that make people their target only because they belong to a particular ethnic or religious community endanger the well-being of the particular community and betray the nation's commitment to equal treatment under the law. Government policies and practices that deny or weaken due process for people accused or suspected of terrorist activities jeopardize these protections for all. In tracking potential terrorists, laws and practices that invade or infringe upon civil liberties without proper judicial oversight threaten the security that comes from being a free people. Policies, practices, and attitudes that are hostile to immigrants living in the United States and that unduly curtail the legal arrival of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers fail to live up to our country's tradition of welcoming newcomers in a fair and generous way. Security from terrorism requires nations to cooperate with one another and with international organizations. Nations must work together to find and track terrorists, to cut off their funds, to prevent terrorists from crossing international borders, to provide protection for high-risk targets, and to improve readiness to respond in the event of new terrorist attacks. International conventions can provide a

common framework for national laws and their effective enforcement. It is therefore significant that all 191 nations in the United Nations in 2001 united in condemning terrorist acts and in pledging to work together to prevent and suppress them. Even with this important cooperation, deep differences exist in the international community about how to respond to terrorism. These differences are evident in opposing views on the political roles of the United Nations and the United States, as may be illustrated in these questions: Are the interests and worldviews of the members of the Security Council so divergent that they render the United Nations ineffective in addressing the threat of terrorism? Or is the dominant power of the United States, with its “war on terrorism,” a greater danger to peace than terrorism itself? Many in other nations perceive that the United States too often acts arrogantly and without sufficient consultation, agreement, and participation of other nations. Citizens in the United States need to hear and evaluate this perception of their nation's actions. According to the social statement “For Peace in God's World,” the United States with its “vital leadership role in world affairs...cannot and should not withdraw or isolate itself from the rest of the world. Neither should it seek to control or police the world.” Like all nations, the United States in pursuing its interests has “an obligation to respect the interests of other states and international actors and to comply with international law. Nations should seek their own common good in the context of the global common good.” Whenever military action is considered, citizens have responsibility to hold their government accountable to just war principles. “At their best, these principles provide a moral framework, ambiguous and imprecise though it be, for public deliberation about war, and guidance for persons deciding what to do when faced with the dilemmas of war.” Especially contentious in the struggle against terrorism is the meaning of three of these principles: legitimate authority (who authorizes war?), last resort (questions of pre-emption), and reasonable chance of success (does this military action increase or decrease the threat of terrorism?). Public vigilance also is needed in times of war to judge whether the war is being rightly fought according to the principles of discrimination (noncombatant immunity) and proportionality (determining whether the evil effects are more or less than the evil prevented). In clarifying and applying these principles, “Christians need to be prepared to say 'no' to wars in which their nation participates.”

Living Beyond Fear

Fear generated by the threat of terrorism may be a reasonable

response to danger, alerting us to take steps to address it. Yet fear can become part of the fabric of society and make people its captives. Fear then paralyzes, divides people, fosters distrust, and clouds judgments. The Gospel promises freedom from living in debilitating fear. Through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit surrounds children, youth, and adults with God's unfailing love. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). In faith we may carry on our lives with the confidence that nothing—including terrorism—"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). Living from the security of faith in God, Christians in a fearful society may exhibit courage to evaluate soberly the threat of terrorism without ignoring it or becoming all-consumed by it. The Gospel also frees "us from fear to see others as brothers and sisters for whom Christ died and lives." Believing that God's love in Christ Jesus extends to all, we are freed to attend to the interests and welfare of those who might be considered "enemies." We are better enabled to know and feel the vulnerability of others around the world and to work for a just peace in light of our mutual vulnerability. As people freed by the Gospel, we need to deepen our understanding of what drives an international terrorist network to carry out attacks such as those of September 11. Is the motivation envy, hate, and resentment toward a prosperous, powerful, and stable society? Is it the belief that the "West" continues to wage a centuries-long crusade against the Islamic world? Is it fear of the freedom of Western societies? Is it the belief that under the guise of freedom a morally corrupt culture is undermining a cherished way of life? Is it because an extremist strain of Islam has captured the imagination of millions of Muslims who see themselves unjustly alienated by the "West"? Is it reaction to United States policy in the Middle East? Is it due to the mysterious presence of evil in the human heart? To explore such questions is not to justify or explain away terrorist acts, much less to blame the victims for them, but to seek to understand by viewing the world from perspectives of other religions, peoples, and nations. A world with less hate and misunderstanding is a more secure one. Trying to understand may help us to check our own hatred and spirit of revenge, to see our own country's part in the world's tangled web of evil, and to approach our responsibilities as repentant and forgiven sinners. Terrorism haunts our times, but so do hunger and poverty, corrupt and brutal political systems, harsh discrimination and social inequalities, civil wars, environmental degradation, and epidemic diseases. These are sources of insecurity and hopelessness for millions, and they belong to a world that "is

increasingly interconnected.” To neglect or be indifferent to these realities while countering terrorism is both morally wrong and shortsighted. Earthly peace in God's creation “is built on the recognition of the unity and goodness of created existence, the oneness of humanity, and the dignity of every person.” A simple yet profound condition for peace is the acknowledgement of the common humanity of all people as God's beloved creatures. This belief too compels us to strengthen our compassionate understanding of peoples throughout the world and to broaden our moral horizon to embrace their suffering and well-being as our concern. This concern takes form in the search for just peace in a global society. This search envisions “a culture of peace,” “an economy with justice,” and “a politics of cooperation.” The comprehensive naming of cultural, economic, and political “tasks” to keep, make, and build peace today in “For Peace in God's World” points to the breadth of this search. Enduring human security for all depends on building just peace.

Interfaith Encounters

History shows that religions, including Christianity, may be a source of both violent conflict and peacemaking. In a time often thought to be secular, religion has taken on new public significance: Two decades ago terrorists tended to frame their activity in political and ideological terms; in recent times an increasing number view their activity in religious categories. Most notably, the network responsible for September 11 as well as other terrorist acts identifies itself as Muslim and claims to be acting to fulfill a supposed divine obligation. Worldwide, millions of Christians will join with millions of Muslims in condemning the belief that God sanctions terrorist acts. Similarly, Christians will insist that for them the struggle with terrorism is not a religious war and do all that they can to make sure it does not become a war between Christians and Muslims. They will understand that it is their moral duty to reject blanket condemnations of Islam, all notions that blame all Muslims for specific terrorist acts, and all attitudes and actions that unjustly discriminate against Muslims on account of their religion. Christians will work with others to protect the religious freedom of Muslims. “Peace is difference in unity. It requires both respect for the uniqueness of others—finite persons in particular communities—and acknowledgment of a common humanity.” “This vision calls us to engage differences, not to ignore or fear them. The hope for earthly peace challenges people to strengthen their own particular communities in ways that promote respect and appreciation for people in other communities, for all share a common humanity.” In

many situations today, religious differences are a source of enmity. Religion is used to incite people to violence. The Church faces new challenges in being a reconciling presence among the religions of the world. We need to learn from Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others, discovering the ways they strive for peace, correcting distorted images, and working for mutual understanding. We rejoice where people of different religions work together to overcome hostility. Our times bid us to intensify our efforts to work with humility and persistence for mutual understanding among all religions, especially among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. This challenge has many dimensions and is only at a beginning stage. It includes personal relationships in neighborhoods, schools, and work places; meetings among congregations, mosques, and synagogues; cooperation with common projects; and scholarly discussions of sacred texts, historical relationships, and living beliefs and practices. It calls for recognizing the great diversity within each religion and for understanding friendly and hostile encounters in multiple contexts. Christians, Muslims, and Jews belong to particular communities that appeal to their own sacred texts and traditions as their authority in matters of life and belief. Fruitful and respectful dialogue will explore how each community draws on what is authoritative in its life to address how societies should order their life together. Some topics, for example, might be: On what bases does each community reject hatred for those who do not belong to their community? What beliefs and practices in each community foster tolerance and respect for others with different beliefs, and what beliefs and practices further pride as well as disdain for the other communities? How does each community make distinctions between justifiable and unjustifiable political violence? What beliefs in each community lead to a principled commitment to a legal order that guarantees religious freedom for all? Christians, Muslims, and Jews should find agreement in denouncing the belief that terrorist acts are a divine obligation. They should also find agreement in recognizing that religious faith can and should be a powerful force for peace.

An Elusive, Prayerful Quest

The Holy Spirit calls us in the Church “to proclaim the Gospel of God’s final peace and to work for earthly peace.” In the Gospel we find consolation in our sorrow, freedom from fear, and hope to carry on the “elusive quest to build earthly peace,” even when terrorism and other evils haunt our times. May we in this quest turn to God in prayer, asking forgiveness for our sins, wisdom for discernment, and renewal

for our spirits; and interceding for those who suffer from terrorism and war, for those who govern the nations, for those who would harm the innocent, for those who help the wounded, and for those who provide security for the endangered.

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your Church, peace among the nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

“You shall not murder” Ex. 20:13

While adopted in 1994, the social message on “Community Violence” remains sadly relevant today. The message speaks about the causes of violence as complex and pervasive, and of how violence breeds violence. In proclaiming the forgiveness and love of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church addresses the root of violence while being committed to social actions that respond directly to community violence and the people it affects. The message explores how the church can live out this commitment as a community of worship, education, service and ongoing deliberation and advocacy.

“Community Violence” urges us to become more involved in countering the reality and fear of violence in our communities and our neighbors’ communities, pursuing justice and seeking peace no matter how long the journey or complex the challenge.

THE REALITY AND FEAR OF VIOLENCE TODAY

Violence between humans is an age-old mark of sin. Cain slew Abel; Shechem raped Dinah; David plotted the death of Uriah. Massacres, raids, and widespread abuse of peoples have been a part of our history. Those in power have often extended their racial, sexual, economic, and/or political domination through violent means. Violence is woven in and through the distinctive stories that have shaped us as Americans.

If there is something timeless about violence, there are also disturbingly new aspects. Today the word violence evokes images of random shootings and muggings on city streets and country lanes; savage abuse of women, men, and children; senseless brutality depicted in movies, TV shows, and video games. The breakdown of families and communities is a widespread fact of life, and violence one of its wages. For some women and children, home is less safe than

the street. Hate crimes continue. Neighborhood, schoolyard, workplace, or family disputes spark into violence and become lethal. They become headline news, reinforcing the atmosphere of violence and inspiring profitable entertainment media.

People who are poor and vulnerable have long experienced life as “nasty, brutish, and short;” now those who thought they were privileged and protected are also haunted by violence. Many of the young, who previously were sheltered from exposure to violence, are now not only “entertained” by violence, but increasingly are both its victims and perpetrators. People who are poor, who are of color, or who live in inner cities are typically the most pervasively and deeply affected by violence. However, disintegrating social structures and values have occasioned turbulence that affects people of every class, color, and locality.

Even when experienced as stark and brutal, the causes of violence are complex. Different forms of violence have distinctive dynamics and remedies. Social as well as individual factors are involved. The collapse of families, economic injustices, breakdown of community institutions, unemployment, inadequate moral formation and guidance, personal irresponsibility, racism and sexism, inability to deal with anger and conflict, homophobia, low self-esteem, psychological problems, biochemical imbalances, and substance abuse — these and other factors lie behind the incidence of violent crime today. Fear, anxiety, and alienation are expressed through readily-available weapons of destruction. Violence breeds more violence. Incidents of violence stir up anger and a craving for vengeance. Fear festers an attitude of “we’re not going to take it anymore.” Increasingly, our national mood has been described as one of “getting mad and getting even.” Possessing a gun is viewed by many ordinary citizens as their last line of defense against the chaos in society, or at least a means by which to get some respect. Harsher, more vindictive sentences (including the death penalty) have much popular appeal, despite their expense and failure to deter further crime.

“Tough on crime” policy stances are often proposed in response to the fear of violent crimes. Such stances have their place, but also their limits. Although police and prisons help to protect society, they have no real effect on the causes of violence. More prison cells and larger police forces do not necessarily lead to greater security. The United States has the highest imprisonment rate in the world, but that has not significantly affected its high rate of violent crime. Instead of addressing the root causes of violence, “tough on crime” measures

can blind us to the injustices that breed violence in the first place. People of color or those who do not speak English have long been suspicious of the protection and justice that police and criminal justice systems claim to provide. Prisons can often become “schools” that harden criminals, making them even more disillusioned and enraged. Violence and rumors of violence continue to spread — feared yet also expected in daily life. In the face of this, what are we as a church called to be and do? What resources of our faith can we bring to bear on this apparently intractable predicament? How shall we respond to both victims and perpetrators of violence? What shall we do in cooperation with others as together we seek to counter violence in our communities?

RESPONDING OUT OF THE FAITH WE CONFESS

In the face of violence, God's resolve for peace in human communities is unshakable. Deliberate acts to harm or kill innocent people violate God's intention for human community. God's commandment is “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). In proclaiming God's law, we declare that all people are accountable before God and the community to honor and respect the life God has given.

Before God, we all are in captivity to sin, and in need of God's mercy. Some have committed acts of violence. Others have been sinned against through acts of violence. Still others are overwhelmed by fears of violence. In proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ's forgiveness, healing, and new life, the church addresses the ultimate root of violence. Through his death, Christ broke down the dividing walls of hostility, fear, and violence between people, reconciling us to God and one another (Eph. 2:13-17). God's reign of peace has come in Jesus Christ, and will be complete in a “new heaven and new earth” where death and pain “will be no more” (Rev. 21:1,4).

The Holy Spirit works among us to wrench us from violence, hate, greed, and fear, and transforms us into people who are called to trust God and live in community with one another. In doing so, we need to confront the violent tendencies within ourselves and our society, and find ways to cultivate the practice of nonviolence. Christians, as salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13) and light of the world (Mt. 5:14), are called to respond to violent crime in the restorative ways taught by Jesus (Mt. 5:38-39) and shown by his actions (Jn. 8:311). Rather than reacting out of fear, or out of a vengeful desire to “get even” with those we consider our “enemies” (Lk. 6:27ff), we realize they are our neighbors. We are empowered to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make violence so pervasive.

According to Lutheran theology, society is to be ruled by the civil use of the Law. Government is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and public order. Just laws and their proper enforcement by police and courts are necessary to restrain violence. But laws and their enforcement are often corrupted by sin. As citizens in a democracy, we have the responsibility to join with others to hold government accountable for protecting society and ensuring justice for all, and to seek changes in policies and practices toward these ends.

PURSuing OUR COMMITMENT TO COUNTER COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

➤ As a Community of Worship

The cross and resurrection have broken the cycle of violence, freeing us for God's future and for one another. We confess how we have sinned and been sinned against through violence. Through prayer and absolution, the power of what God has promised is able to disarm our captivity to violence. Gathered around word and sacrament, we remember and celebrate this gift of peace given the world in Jesus Christ. We are nourished and strengthened to make peace and to embrace those who are victims of violence and often feel silenced. They need to speak of their pain and lingering fears, and to hear the word of new life in ways that are effective in healing the pain and overcoming the fears; those who have done violence to others, and their families, who often feel frozen out of the community of faith. They need to hear God's law and gospel in their lives, so that they might turn and walk in the newness of life; and those who protect and defend society, enforce laws, settle disputes, and maintain domestic tranquillity. They need to be supported as they live out their vocation for the sake of the common good.

➤ As a Community of Education and Service

Communities of faith, on their own, through social ministry organizations, and in partnership with others, are called to minister to those in captivity to violence through such efforts as providing a "safe place," counseling, and other services that enable people to face and deal with the realities and fears of violence in their lives; mediating to achieve just and peaceful solutions to social conflicts in their communities; educating children and adults in how to deal with anger, disagreement, discrimination, and disappointment in nonviolent ways; assisting those affected by poverty, racism, family instability, domestic violence, and unemployment as they seek to deal with these challenges; organizing activities and programs that are effective in moving youth, especially those attracted to gangs and hate groups,

from disillusionment to hope; supporting organizing efforts that empower communities to effect change; ministering with persons who have committed violent crimes so that they might be restored as productive participants in their communities; building relationships of trust between neighborhood residents and law enforcement officers; and enabling people to reclaim their violence-plagued communities, especially through community economic development.

➤ *As a Community of Advocacy*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to: work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of creation.

In service of its commitment to counter violence, the ELCA publicly advocates in opposition to the death penalty because the death penalty perpetuates violence, its actual use is not fair, and it fails to make society better or safer. The ELCA also advocates in favor of gun control. These stances alone, however, cannot presume to stop the tide of violence, much less address the causes.

Violent crime and those who perpetuate it must be stopped. The challenge is to restrain violence in ways that effectively limit it, and that do not simply repay violence with more violence. Some violence is a reminder of the failure to ensure justice for all members of a society. Many people — due to race, language, economic class, gender, or sexual orientation — have not received the protection and justice necessary for human well-being. Others suffer from individual pathologies. Attention must be given to those especially vulnerable because of the breakdown of families and other communities of moral formation. Short-term measures to counter violence are needed, as well as long-term measures to counter social and economic inequalities and the brokenness that contribute to violence.

As we move toward a more comprehensive address of community violence, we join with other religious communities in anti-violence initiatives that:

- offer vital spiritual and moral resources for replacing fear and violence with hope and reconciliation in our homes, communities, and nation; stem the proliferation of guns in our streets, schools, and homes; counter the “culture of violence” that pervades our national culture and media; build strong anti-violence coalitions in our neighborhoods and communities; develop peer mediation skills in the schools; and protect our youth from the epidemic of violence

through equitable law enforcement, and the promotion of education, social programs, anti-drug programs, and real job opportunities.

We also join with others in working through government and with the advertising and media industries to find ways to respect free expression while abhorring and seeking appropriate ways to limit expressions of violence in electronic media and film.

➤ *As a Community of Ongoing Deliberation*

As a church committed to “contribute toward the upbuilding of the common good and the revitalizing of public life through open and inclusive processes of deliberation,” we call for public discussions of violence that:

- continue to examine the appropriateness and effectiveness of measures such as the death penalty and gun control; question a one-sided approach to violence, which would make persecution and punishment the primary remedies; object to the manipulation of fear of violence by some who hold or seek public office; deplore how “toughness on crime” can play into the racism infecting and affecting all in this society; explore specific ways violence has shaped and influenced our history; challenge the logic of winning by destroying one's opponents, which Scripture has sometimes been used to justify; explore how depictions of violence in the media (typically apart from the pain and anguish) affect actual violence in society; and consider not only short-term measures, but also long-term address of the recalcitrant discrimination and injustices that lie behind many expressions of violence.

We call on members and congregations of the ELCA to consider the international dimensions of violence and militarism by studying and discussing drafts of the social statement, *Peace: God's Gift, Our Calling*. Communities of faith are also encouraged to explore some of the wider economic issues related to community violence by participating in processes leading to the development of an economic social statement.

Guiding us is a vision of the age-to-come in which people are free from violence, justice is done, and the common good is realized. “They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (Is. 65:25). May that promise stir us to challenge and heal violence in our day!