

# Called to Hear

## A STUDY GUIDE



**Welcome to “Called to Hear,”** a study guide for the ELCA’s social statement “The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries.” The social statement was adopted by the ELCA’s Churchwide Assembly in 2013 and presents a comprehensive perspective on matters related to the U.S. criminal justice system and the many communities affected by this system. This Scripture-based, expert-led study guide was developed to help you explore the topic and be moved to action.

The social statement represents years of study and discernment and was adopted by the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. It is a public document about what this church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, teaches about faith and the criminal justice system. Engaging this topic through this study guide enables participants to sift through the daily “noise” of life to listen to voices from within the ELCA who work and live with the issues every day.

The five sessions of this study guide unfold in the same manner as the social statement itself. First, we acknowledge both the

strengths and problems in the criminal justice system as well as our commitment as people of faith to care and respond. Then we move on to listen to a wide range of people who have been impacted by the system, including prisoners, lawyers, officers and family members. As we allow ourselves to hear the cries of God’s people, we ask, “What would God have us do?”

That question leads us straight to God’s messages regarding justice. Finally, we take all the pieces—the problems within the system, our Christian calling, the pain of those affected and God’s models of justice—and bring them together to determine the actions we can take to bring about God’s vision of love.

The ELCA embarked on writing the social statement and this accompanying study in order to inspire informed attitudes and create life-changing actions. Through these resources may all participants better understand how they are called to hear the cries and to serve God’s intention of ministry and justice for all.



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God’s work. Our hands.



Leader's Introduction | Additional Resources | All Handouts | ELCA Social Statement | Print

As you can imagine, participants will come to class with various experiences, opinions and feelings about the criminal justice system. This may seem daunting to you as the leader. But be assured that this study is not intended to be a free-for-all forum that devolves into debate and division.

**This interactive PDF contains everything you need to readily carry out a five-session study.**

**A Leader's Introduction:** Click this link for an overview of how the five sessions fit together.

**ELCA Social Statement:** Read the official document or its supplemental summary and brief introduction to educate yourself and participants.

**Additional Resources:** Click on this link to review additional materials that provide links to further action or that can enrich a session, including a brief explanation about ELCA social statements.

**Print:** Click to print this document.

**Sessions 1–5:** Rollover and click on the button for each session to find complete leader instructions, a video teaching clip, and a session handout that contains discussion questions, stories and take-home information for participants.

**“For what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).**



## SESSION ONE: Hearing the Call

### Get Ready

#### GOALS

#### TIME PLAN/ PREPARATION

### Outline

#### OPENING

#### QUIZ

#### VIDEO TEACHING

#### DISCUSSION

#### BIBLE STUDY

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## Session One—Hearing the Call

### Get ready for Session One

This is the first of the five-session study guide on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries." ([www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements))

#### THERE ARE THREE GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING THIS SESSION:

1. Participants will be introduced to the criminal justice system and the need for dramatic reforms.
2. Participants will be introduced to the social statement and consider several reasons Lutherans are called to care and respond. These reasons include our baptismal promises, Jesus' model of faithful service and the compassionate "marks" of the Christian church.
3. Participants will turn to foundational biblical texts from the social statement that show God's concern for love and justice.



**SESSION ONE:**  
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**the Call**

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**TIME PLAN**

Each session is based on a 50-minute class period. Here is the time plan to cover the material for Session One:

Opening hymn, prayer and overview	5 minutes
Quiz highlighting facts about the current system	10 minutes
Teaching video: "Hearing the Call"	10 minutes
Small group discussion	10 minutes
Bible study on "Hearing the Call"	10 minutes
Review, preview and closing prayers	5 minutes

**LEADER'S PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS:**

- Make one copy of the handout for each learner.
- Be sure you have pens, a DVD player, screen, hymnals and Bibles.
- Preview the video to test out your church's DVD player or Internet connection.
- Prepare to have it cued up before the session begins.
- Read through the first section of the social statement, pages 1 through 7.
- As needed, order printed copies of the social statement from the ELCA Resource Information Service, 800-638-3522, or online at [www.ELCA.org/resources](http://www.ELCA.org/resources). The statement may also be downloaded from [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).
- In each session, a story written by a real person provides optional material for reflection.



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## Session One

### OPENING HYMN, PRAYER AND OVERVIEW (10 MINUTES)

#### Sing "Let Justice Flow like Streams" (ELW 717)

#### Pray the following opening prayer:

*God of mercy and justice,*

*Be with us now as we listen and learn.*

*May we be immersed in your word and ways.*

*May we work for justice and peace in all the world. Amen*

#### **Present participants with an overview of the five-week class:**

This five-session class explores the ELCA social statement, "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries." Each week we are invited into a new way of listening:

1. Hearing the Call: Why are we called to care about our broken system?
2. Hearing the Voices: Who is crying out?
3. Hearing God's Call for Justice: How does God guide us to seek justice?
4. Hearing How to Respond Wisely: What are some models of ministry?
5. Hearing How to Make a Difference: How can we advocate for change?





SESSION ONE: Hearing the Call

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QUIZ HIGHLIGHTING FACTS ABOUT THE CURRENT SYSTEM (10 minutes)

Distribute handouts and pens. Give participants a few minutes to fill out the quiz on the handout, which is sort of a "hearing test" that highlights some facts about the criminal justice system and the need for reform. Read the correct answers so participants can find out how much they know, and encourage them to note the facts that surprised them.

Answers to the quiz:

1. What percentage of prisoners in the corrections system are mentally ill?  
**b. 50 percent**
2. Which nation in the world has the highest number of citizens imprisoned as a percentage of their population?  
**b. United States**
3. How much does the United States spend on the corrections system annually?  
**b. \$60 billion**
4. What proportion of U.S. adults are in prison, on probation or on parole?  
**c. 1 in 34 adults**
5. Crime rates since the early 1990s have been...  
**a. declining**
6. What proportion of African American males will go to prison in their lifetime?  
**a. 1 in 3 males**
7. Highest increases in incarceration in the past three decades have been for...  
**a. drug offenses**
8. Incarceration rates since 1970 have...  
**c. quadrupled**
9. Youth transferred to the adult system are \_\_\_\_\_ likely to offend in the future than their peers who remain in the juvenile system.  
**b. more**
10. Approximately what percentage of prisoners identify themselves as Christian?  
**a. 60 percent**



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**VIDEO TEACHING SESSION** (10 minutes)

Invite participants to turn over their handout to the side with the cross. Turn on the video player. The presenter, Cynthia Osborne, will cover the following main points during the video clip:

We are called to care about this topic because:

1. We are members of the body of Christ.
2. We are led by God through Holy Scripture.
3. Our church heritage calls us to compassionate suffering.
4. Our faith calls us to confession.

The video covers these three key points from the social statement:

- The ELCA is prompted to speak and to act because so many cries of suffering and despair emerge from the criminal justice system—from victims, the incarcerated, their families, communities, those wrongly convicted, those who work in the system—and have not been heard.
- Drawing from Holy Scripture, the ELCA holds up a vision of God's justice that is wondrously richer and deeper than human efforts and yet is a gauge against which justice in this world, God's world, must always be assessed.
- Christians are called to confess that we, as individuals and in our common life together, often have fallen short in responding to criminal justice—both in response to crime's harm and to problems in the justice system.



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### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups (two to six members each, depending on class size) to discuss study questions related to the video. The questions are printed on the handout. You can assign or participants can choose which questions to discuss.

1. Why does it matter that the ELCA creates social statements?
2. Which aspect of our call to respond spoke the loudest to you?
3. How is God's justice wondrously richer and deeper than ours?
4. What gets in the way of compassionate suffering?
5. How has the criminal justice system intersected with your life?
6. What do you most hope for and worry about in studying this topic?





## SESSION ONE: Hearing the Call

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## BIBLE STUDY ON "HEARING THE CALL" (10 minutes)

Regather the group to focus on foundational biblical texts for Session One.

1. Point out the biblical references printed in the middle of the cross on the handout.
2. Invite volunteers to read the texts aloud.
3. Point out the references to the texts in the social statement.

**Amos 5:24** (found on page 5 of the statement)

*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.*

**1 John 1:5-9** (page 6 of the statement)

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

4. Break into the same small groups as earlier. Task each group with writing a prayer petition based on the two texts and something they learned in the session. For example, May your light shine, O God, for those who are imprisoned without hope. Amen

There is space below the quiz on the handout in which to write down a prayer petition.



## SESSION ONE: Hearing the Call

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## REVIEW, PREVIEW AND CLOSING PRAYERS (5 minutes)

### Review the main points you covered

- Facts about the criminal justice system
- Theological content about why we are called to care
- Bible texts that describe God's work and our call

Invite class members back for the next session, titled "Hearing the Voices," during which they will listen to a wide range of people whose lives have been affected by the criminal justice system. Encourage them to read the corresponding section on Assessing the System in the social statement, pages 7–15.

### Closing prayer.

Ask each group to read their petitions aloud. Pray the Lord's Prayer in unison to close the session.



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

### Get Ready

#### GOALS

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#### OPENING

#### Scripture Reading

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## Session Two—Hearing the Voices: Who is crying out?

### Get ready for Session Two

This is the second of the five-session study guide for the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries."

#### **THERE ARE THREE GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING THIS SESSION:**

1. Learners will turn to a foundational text for this session, the parable of the good Samaritan, and consider how it illustrates people crying out.
2. Learners will hear the stories of some of the people crying out for justice.
3. Learners will pay particular attention to racism as an integral problem in the criminal justice system.



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

### Get Ready

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PREPARATION

### Outline

OPENING

Scripture Reading

VIDEO/DISCUSSION

CLOSING

### TIME PLAN

Each session is based on a 50-minute class period. Here is the time plan to cover the material for Session Two.

Opening hymn, prayer and Bible reading	5 minutes
Teaching video: Hearing the Voices (part 1)	20 minutes
Small group discussion	
Teaching video: Hearing the Voices (part 2)	20 minutes
Review, preview and closing prayers	5 minutes

### LEADER'S PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS:

- Make one copy of the handout for each participant.
- Be sure you have pens, a DVD player, screen, hymnals and Bibles.
- Preview the video to test out your church's DVD player or Internet connection.
- Prepare to have the video cued up.
- Read through Section II of the social statement, *Assessing the System*, pages 7–15.
- Have copies of the social statement available for participants.  
(Copies may be ordered from the ELCA Resource Information Service, 800-638-3522, or online at [www.ELCA.org/resources](http://www.ELCA.org/resources). The statement may also be downloaded from [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements).)



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

Get Ready

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OPENING

Scripture Reading

VIDEO/DISCUSSION

CLOSING

## Session Two

### OPENING HYMN, PRAYER AND BIBLE READING (10 MINUTES)

**Sing "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love"** (ELW 708)

**Pray the following opening prayer:**

*God, you hear us when we cry out*

*And call us to listen to the cries of your people.*

*Be with us now as we hear stories of love and loss.*

*May we listen in faith. Amen*



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

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### Invite a volunteer to read the parable of the good Samaritan.

#### **Luke 10:25-37**

*Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."*

*But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*





## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

### Get Ready

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OPENING

Scripture Reading

VIDEO/DISCUSSION

Video Part 1

Discussion Part 1

Video Part 2

Discussion Part 2

CLOSING

## VIDEO TEACHING SESSION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

(40 minutes. This video has two presenters; each video and discussion section should be about 20 minutes.)

### Invite class members to turn to their handout.

The presenters will cover the following main points during the video clips:

1. People in every part of the criminal justice system are crying out for help and change.
2. The good Samaritan parable shows us how to listen and be a neighbor to those in need.
3. Racism is an integral problem in the criminal justice system.

The experiences and stories of real people give flesh-and-blood urgency to addressing the problems in the system. The video underscores ideas from the parable of the good Samaritan and covers these two key points from the social statement:

*An underlying punitive mindset, budgetary constraints and persistent inequalities based on race and class frequently challenge the U.S. justice system's basic principles and impose significant costs on all involved in the system, and on society as a whole.*

*Guided by compassion as one of the historic "marks" of the church, the ELCA is called to renewed ministry on behalf of those whom the system affects: victims of crime and their families, the incarcerated and their families, affected communities, those who work in the system, and many others.*

### Watch Part 1 of the video and discuss the following questions:



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

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#### Video Part 1

#### Discussion Part 1

#### Video Part 2

#### Discussion Part 2

#### CLOSING

### Small group discussion

Divide the class into small groups (three to six members each, depending on class size) to discuss study questions related to the video. The questions are printed on the handout. You can assign or participants can discuss any or all questions.

1. How did Ryan's story surprise you? Move you?
2. What is one thing you learned by watching the video that you didn't know before?
3. Who might the Good Samaritan hear crying out near your church?
4. There are all sorts of voices crying out. You may wish to read the additional story from the handout. (See below) Ask what other stories participants might share that involve people in the criminal justice system—police officer, judge, court reporter, family members, or many others?

### Optional discussion activity: A story from someone in the criminal justice system

**(As summarized by the person)** I suppose that being in prison is different for everyone. For me it is the boredom—the isolation—the disconnection from family and friends. I accept that I broke the law and put myself here. I robbed the bank. Drugs were at the root of it all. I'm addicted and needed a way to get them. Now here I am—staring down five years in federal prison, half way across the country from my family and hometown—so no visits. I hate it here. Letting your guard down makes you weak and an easy target—so I try to do my own things and stay out of the way. I've got a lot of time but I've already started counting the days.



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

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VIDEO/DISCUSSION

Video Part 1

Discussion Part 1

**Video Part 2**

Discussion Part 2

CLOSING

**Watch Part 2 of the video and discuss the following questions (20 minutes):**

### Small group discussion

1. What images do you remember most from Ulysses' story?
2. Has your congregation ever talked about the presence of racism in the criminal justice system?
3. What could this definition of racism mean for the church and an assessment of the criminal justice system: Racism occurs when prejudice mixes with systems of power and privilege. (From the ELCA social statement "Freed in Christ," page 4, available at [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements))



## SESSION TWO: Hearing The Voices

### Get Ready

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## REVIEW, PREVIEW AND CLOSING PRAYERS (5 minutes)

### Briefly review

- Jesus' discipleship lessons in the parable of the good Samaritan
- Stories of people who are crying out for help and change
- Racism as part of a broken system

Invite class members back for the next session, titled "Hearing God's Call for Justice," during which they will look at examples of justice in the Bible. Encourage them to read the corresponding section on justice and yearning in the social statement, pages 16–23.

### Pray the Lord's Prayer in unison.



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

### Get Ready

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#### OPENING

#### Review Questions

#### Scripture Reading

#### VIDEO

#### DISCUSSION

#### GROUP ACTIVITY

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#### Review

#### Closing Prayer

#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

## Session Three—Hearing God's Call for Justice: How does God guide us to seek justice?

### Get ready for Session Three

This is the third of the five-session study on the ELCA social statement "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries."

#### THERE ARE THREE GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING THIS SESSION:

1. Participants will review key points from the previous two sessions.
2. Participants will consider God's justice strategies for taking care of us.
3. Participants will lift up the yearnings we feel for justice, based on God's promises for the future and the inequities of this moment.

During the third session, class participants will delve into the subject of God's call for justice. They will go away with a better understanding of how God's sense of justice perplexes, challenges and inspires us.

This session is in a sense the foundation of this study, because God's call is the prompt for our compassion and action. "Christians in their longing for Christ find themselves deeply immersed in the sufferings of the world." By combining what God teaches us about justice, and our yearning for a Christ-like world (aka "the kingdom"), we can find the power and hope to face daunting issues in the criminal justice system.



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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### TIME PLAN

Each session is based on a 50-minute class period. Here is the time plan to cover the material for Session Three:

Opening hymn, prayer and review	10 minutes
Teaching video: Hearing God's Call for Justice	20 minutes
Small group discussion	
Group activity: God's promises and our yearning	15 minutes
Review, preview and closing prayers	5 minutes

### LEADER'S PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS:

- Make one copy of the handout for each learner.
- Be sure you have pens, a DVD player, screen, hymnals, Bibles, a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and tape.
- Preview the video to test out your church's DVD player or Internet connection.
- Prepare to have the video cued up.
- Read through Section III of the social statement, Justice and Yearning, on pages 16–22.
- Provide copies of the social statement.





## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

### Get Ready

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## Session Three

### OPENING HYMN, PRAYER AND REVIEW (10 MINUTES)

Sing "Goodness Is Stronger than Evil" (ELW 721)

Pray the following opening prayer:

*Merciful Creator,*

*Make us mindful of your will for the creation you love.*

*May your justice prevail on earth and give us a glimpse  
of your kingdom to come. Amen*



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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**Introduce Session Three by briefly reviewing Sessions One and Two with these questions:**

#### Session One review questions for the large group

- Why are we called as congregations and the ELCA to address this issue?  
*(we are members of the body of Christ; we are led by God through Holy Scripture; our church, the ELCA, calls us to confess our lack of engagement and to practice compassionate suffering)*
- Who gives us the power to look at what is so difficult?  
*(God, the ones who cry out, the community of believers)*

#### Session Two review questions

- Who are the voices crying out?  
*(victims, families, incarcerated individuals, lawyers, judges, corrections officers, youth)*
- What are some injustices that need to change in the criminal justice system?  
*(racism, mass incarceration, youth detention, lack of opportunities for rehabilitation, lack of support for re-entry)*

As class participants answer these questions, write their answers on the whiteboard or large piece of paper in the front of the classroom.

During Session Three we take our call to do justice (Session One) and the cries of those who seek justice (Session Two), and place them in the context of how God does justice. We look for answers in the Bible and in the life of Jesus and Christians committed to bringing in God's kingdom. Our study is based on justice texts from the Old and New Testaments.



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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### Invite volunteers to read these two texts:

#### Amos 5:21–24

*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies ... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

#### Luke 4:16–21

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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## VIDEO TEACHING SESSION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (20 minutes)

The presenter will cover the following main points during the video clip:

1. Sin and justice are interrelated.
2. God dispenses justice via human institutions and kingdom visions, through accountability and forgiveness.
3. We yearn to follow God's models of justice.

The video covers these two key points from the social statement:

*Drawing from Holy Scripture, this church holds up a vision of God's justice that is wondrously richer and deeper than human imitations and yet is a mirror in which justice in this world, God's world, must always be assessed.*

*In assessing the current system, the ELCA gives thanks for its principles and orientation toward justice. The church recognizes many in the system who serve their professional vocations with competent and humane performance.*



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups (two to six members each, depending on class size) to discuss study questions related to the video. The questions are printed on the handout. Participants can discuss any or all questions.

1. What are the two justice strategies that God uses for taking care of us?
2. Pastor Derek Nelson said, "Yearning is about the dis-connect between where we are and where God wants us to be." What yearnings have you discovered during this study?
3. Imagine "holding up God's justice as a mirror to compare how well human institutions are doing." What do you see in that mirror?
4. Why is it so radical that the church has the opportunity to practice God's brand of grace-filled mercy? Who else would do so in our society?



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

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## GROUP ACTIVITY—GOD'S PROMISES AND OUR YEARNING (15 minutes)

The ELCA social statement "The Church and Criminal Justice" names the gulf between our everyday lives and God's intention for justice. This activity illustrates the gulf and how we begin to bridge it by building on the main points of the teaching session just completed.

Invite the whole class to name some injustices they've learned about in the criminal justice system. Write these on a white board or large sheet of paper. Direct participants to look at their handouts.

One side of the handout is titled "God's justice promises." These are statements that remind us of God's vision of justice from Scripture.

1. God's justice creates the wholeness and right relationships that God desires for humankind.
2. God's justice is provided both through the gospel and through institutions and systems that structure our lives.
3. God's justice says every life matters, and models an even distribution of love and care for every single one of God's children.
4. God's justice promises the forgiveness of sin, in accordance with the life and death of Jesus Christ.

**The other side of the handout is titled "Our justice yearnings." These are statements illustrating the yearnings God has instilled in us for God's ways.**

1. We yearn for a good exercise of the law and a civil government that reduces fear by establishing security.
2. We yearn to hear God's word of hope within the world's hardest places.
3. We yearn to follow Jesus' model of discipleship and justice, because his suffering broke open our lives to the world's suffering.
4. We yearn for the justice of Christ's coming kingdom, and listen to the cries for justice that ring out right now. They cannot wait.

*continued on next page*





## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

### Get Ready

#### GOALS

#### TIME PLAN/ PREPARATION

### Outline

#### OPENING

Review Questions

Scripture Reading

#### VIDEO

#### DISCUSSION

#### GROUP ACTIVITY

#### CLOSING

Review

Closing Prayer

#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

### Group activity—God's promises and our yearning continued

Invite a volunteer to read the first statement about God's justice promises on their handout. Another volunteer reads a concurrent first statement about Our justice yearning. Continue alternating volunteers reading the statements.

After all the statements have been read, attach copies of the handout lists with God's justice promises and Our justice yearnings on top of the injustices you wrote down earlier on the white board or paper. Be sure to leave some space between the two lists.

Point out to the class that this space between the lists represents the dis-connect that Pastor Nelson mentioned between God's vision for justice and our God-given yearnings. The dis-connect calls us to action so we can connect to God's people and God's vision of justice. The remaining two sessions of the study will be about addressing the dis-connect through concrete actions that translate our God-given yearnings into change.



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

### Get Ready

GOALS

TIME PLAN/  
PREPARATION

### Outline

OPENING

Review Questions

Scripture Reading

VIDEO

DISCUSSION

GROUP ACTIVITY

CLOSING

Review

Closing Prayer

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

## REVIEW, PREVIEW AND CLOSING PRAYER (5 minutes)

### Briefly review

- Sin and justice are interrelated.
- God dispenses justice via human institutions and kingdom visions, through accountability and forgiveness.
- We yearn to follow God's models of justice.

### Closing prayer

*Gracious God, author of all justice, you alone are truly just and utterly merciful. Give us wisdom to know what is right, and eyes to see what is wrong in our system. Teach us what is good and just; help us give dignity to your children, made in your image. Bless those whose vocation is to administer justice. Amen*

Invite class members back for the next session, titled "Hearing How to Respond Wisely," during which they will explore some models of ministry.

Encourage participants to read the corresponding section on Wise Responses of Love in the social statement, pages 23–31.



## SESSION THREE: Hearing God's Call for Justice

### Get Ready

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GROUP ACTIVITY

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Review

Closing Prayer

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: SING OUT FOR JUSTICE! (5 minutes)

Invite the class to do what Lutherans do so well, sing! The following hymns underscore the lessons of Session Three about God's justice. Select several of your favorites to sing, depending on time. Use any musicians who are in the class for accompaniment.

604 ELW – O Christ, Our Hope

708 ELW – Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love

712 ELW – Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

715 ELW – Christ, Be Our Light

718 ELW – In a Lowly Manger Born

721 ELW – Goodness Is Stronger than Evil

726 ELW – Light Dawns on a Weary World

After you sing a verse of two of a hymn, discuss the words of the hymn to illustrate what you have learned about justice.



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

#### GOALS

#### TIME PLAN/ PREPARATION

### Outline

#### OPENING

#### SCRIPTURE EXERCISE

#### VIDEO

#### DISCUSSION

#### CLOSING

## Session Four—Hearing How to Respond Wisely: What are some models of ministry?

### Get ready for Session Four

This is the fourth of the five-session study on the ELCA social statement “The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries.”

#### THERE ARE THREE GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING THIS SESSION:

1. Participants will hear two pertinent Scripture passages for this session's focus, and write three theme prompts in 3-minute increments.
2. Participants will learn more about hospitality and accompaniment, two examples of wise responses of love.
3. Participants will amass a list of 25 ideas (referencing Matthew 25):
  - 5 needs in the criminal justice realm,
  - 5 assets of the congregation,
  - 5 follow-up action steps,
  - 5 burdens that God bears for us, and
  - 5 people in the community who could consult with the church.

Through the video presentation and activities, participants will learn from models of hospitality and accompaniment already being practiced in congregations and prison ministries. They will become “versed” in both the burdens people in the system are bearing, and Matthew 25, which calls us to care and act. Class participants will brainstorm ways their congregation could get involved and make a difference via hospitality and accompaniment.



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

GOALS

TIME PLAN/  
PREPARATION

### Outline

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EXERCISE

VIDEO

DISCUSSION

CLOSING

### TIME PLAN

Each session is based on a 50-minute class period. Here is the time plan to cover the material for Session Four.

Opening hymn and prayer	5 minutes
Scripture reading and writing exercise	10 minutes
Teaching video: Hearing How to Respond Wisely	15 minutes
Large group brainstorm about next steps	15 minutes
Review, preview and closing prayers	5 minutes

### LEADER'S PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS:

- Make one copy of the handout for each learner.
- Be sure you have pens, a DVD player, screen, hymnals and Bibles.
- Preview the video to test out your church's DVD player or Internet connection.
- Prepare to have the video cued up before the session begins.
- Read through Section IV of the social statement, *Wise Responses of Love*, on pages 23–31.
- Provide copies of the ELCA social statement.
- (Optional) Provide copies of "A very short and partial list of useful resources" found under the "Resources" link on the study guide's Start Page.



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

Get Ready

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CLOSING

## Session Four

### OPENING HYMN AND PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

**Sing "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"** (ELW 712)

**Pray the following opening prayer:**

*Gracious God, we live in hope of restoration knowing what you have promised to us. Teach us about your love and the ways we can witness to you through hospitality and accompaniment. In Jesus' name. Amen*



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

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EXERCISE

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## SCRIPTURE READINGS AND WRITING EXERCISE (10 minutes)

**Invite participants to listen closely as you read Galatians 6:2 aloud, so they can repeat the verse back to you.**

*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Divide the large group in half to read this rendition of Matthew 25 responsively (Taken from The Message).

### Readings

#### Group 1

Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

*I was hungry and you fed me,  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
I was in prison and you came to me.*

#### Group 2

Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?

#### Group 1

*I'm telling you the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.*

### Writing exercise

The purpose of this exercise is twofold:

1) participants can gather their thoughts and experiences before stating these ideas out loud, and 2) participants can empathize with the themes of this session.

Invite participants to locate these three writing prompts on their handout. They will write for 3 minutes about each prompt in the space provided. Assure participants that they can write a great deal in 3 minutes, and that their writing is just for themselves. The leader starts the timer for each 3-minute time period and calls time.

- A time I visited someone in need ...
- A time someone visited me when I was in need ...
- Burdens that people bear in the criminal justice system ...



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

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## VIDEO TEACHING SESSION (15 minutes)

The presenter will cover the following main points during the video clip:

1. As the church, we are called and invited to demonstrate Christ's radical love through concrete acts of welcoming and bearing another's burdens.
2. Hospitality is a central feature of the biblical witness, and, therefore, of Lutheran social teaching. Many congregations have found ways of extending hospitality to those affected by crime and the criminal justice system.
3. Accompaniment names a basic practice of ministry—the work simply of journeying with those harmed though some period of their lives. Jesus Christ models such accompaniment.

The video covers this key point about ministry from the social statement:

- *Through ministry with and bearing the burdens of those in the criminal justice system members of this church can respond wisely through four practices: hearing the cries, hospitality, accompaniment and advocacy.*





## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

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### BRIEF LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (5 minutes)

Keep the whole group together. Ask participants to share one thought about what they have just heard about ministry. If time permits, discuss or ask about the difference between hospitality and accompaniment.

### LARGE GROUP BRAINSTORM ABOUT NEXT STEPS (15 MINUTES)

Record large group answers on a whiteboard or large piece of paper.

5 needs that must be addressed in the criminal justice realm

5 assets of the congregation

5 follow-up action steps

5 burdens that God bears for us

5 people in the community who could consult with the church

---

*These 5's add up to Matthew 25 – I was in prison and you visited me...*



## SESSION FOUR: Hearing How to Respond Wisely

### Get Ready

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## REVIEW, PREVIEW AND CLOSING PRAYERS (5 minutes)

### Review the ideas covered in Session Four – Hearing How to Respond Wisely

- A writing exercise about texts from Galatians and Matthew
- Teaching about hospitality and accompaniment
- Large group brainstorm about next steps

Invite class members back for the final session, titled “Hearing How to Make a Difference,” which is about being empowered by our Advocate the Holy Spirit to advocate for change. Encourage participants to read the corresponding section on Paths to Greater Justice in the social statement, pages 31–47. (Alert them to some resources for reflection or action; pass out a very short and partial list of useful resources if you made copies.)

### Closing prayer

Invite the group to repeat the Galatians 6:2 verse they learned at the start of the session as God's closing prayer for our lives:

*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*



## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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#### OPENING

#### Advocacy 101

#### BIBLE STUDY

#### VIDEO

#### CONVICTIONS

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## Session Five—Hearing How to Make a Difference: How can we advocate for change?

### Get ready for Session Five

This is the fifth of the five-session study on the ELCA social statement “The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries.”

#### **THERE ARE THREE GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING THIS SESSION:**

1. Participants will delve into the topic of advocacy, and recall that we call the Holy Spirit our “Advocate.”
2. Participants will learn about particular issues in the criminal justice system that need reforming.
3. Participants will share their convictions about this study and commit to further actions.

During this final session, participants hear a presenter who teaches about reform of the criminal justice system. Participants will examine positive trends that have emerged in recent years regarding the criminal justice system. They will be empowered to call for and support reform in particular areas, such as ending discrimination and challenging the practices of mass incarceration.



## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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### TIME PLAN

Each session is based on a 50-minute class period. Here is the time plan to cover the material for Session Five:

Opening hymn, prayer and overview	5 minutes
Bible study on John 14	10 minutes
Teaching video: Hearing How to Make a Difference	10 minutes
Convictions and commitments	15 minutes
Review and closing litany	10 minutes

### LEADER'S PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS:

- Make one copy of the handout for each learner.
- Be sure you have pens, a DVD player, screen, hymnals and Bibles.
- Preview the video to test out your church's DVD player or Internet connection.
- Prepare to have the video cued up before the session begins.
- Read the Advocacy section of the social statement on page 30 and Section VII, Paths to Greater Justice, on pages 39–47.
- Provide copies of the ELCA social statement.
- Optional: Provide copies of the main points covered during the video clip. (See below)



## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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## Session Five

### OPENING HYMN, PRAYER AND OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

**Sing "Christ, Be Our Light" (ELW 715)**

**Pray the following opening prayer:**

*Creator God, we recognize the responsibility you have entrusted to us as advocates. Hear our prayers, for the masses who are incarcerated, the systems that are broken, the families that are separated, and your children who need love and change. Give us conviction and courage. Amen*



## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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### Advocacy 101

In order to introduce the topic of advocacy, invite participants to “vote in place,” in other words raising their hand each time they believe a statement is correct.

***What do you think an advocate does? (Raise your hand if you think each statement describes an advocate.) An advocate ...***

- Writes letters to people who are creating laws and policies
- Participates in demonstrations about issues of fairness
- Decides the problems are just too big for action
- Challenges political systems
- Waits for others to take the lead
- Organizes others with a clipboard at church
- Prays for guidance
- Believes it's not Lutheran to challenge authority
- Feels afraid, but acts nevertheless
- Acts like a lone ranger, rather than a community member



## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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## BIBLE STUDY ON JOHN 14 (10 minutes)

**As Christians, we are blessed to be able to place advocacy in the context of our faith.**

**Invite a participant to read John 14:15–17, 25:**

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you ... “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

Divide the class into small groups (two to six members each, depending on class size) to discuss study questions related to the text. The questions are printed on the handout. Participants can discuss any or all questions.

1. How does the word “advocate” sound to you in light of John 14?
2. What powers are released in us with the Advocate empowering us?
3. For what causes and people have you advocated in your life?
4. How would your advocacy look if it was your brother or sister imprisoned?
5. Would younger and older generations look at advocacy differently?



SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

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VIDEO TEACHING SESSION (10 minutes)

Since the post-video discussion is a review of all the study sessions, you will need to share with participants the key ideas from the video. Your presentations of these could be done before or after the video. One option is to provide these points in an extra handout.

The presenter will cover the following main points during the video clip:

1. As Christians we are called to be advocates who speak with and for those who are marginalized, whose voices are not heard.
2. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate who guides and encourages us to act.
3. The ELCA social statement names specific advocacy goals.

Goals:

- The ELCA supports positive trends for reform such as greater emphasis on victims' rights and needs, use of restorative justice, community-based alternatives to incarceration, legislation that reduces

*sentences for certain offenses, the emergence of specialized courts, and the growing emphasis on re-entry. These efforts should be funded and supported adequately.*

- *Because mass incarceration causes significant harms, both personal and social, the ELCA strongly urges those who make and administer correctional policies to take all appropriate measures to limit the use of incarceration as a sanction for criminal offenses. Toward that end the statement identifies three specific paths: pursue alternatives to incarceration, reform sentencing laws and policies, and closely scrutinize national drug policy.*
- *Four other imperatives also require vigorous action from policy makers: the criminal justice system must acknowledge that disparities exist, and address the implicit and explicit racism that persists within; it must recognize the special needs of juvenile offenders; it must foster the full reintegration of ex-offenders into community.*





## SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

### Get Ready

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## CONVICTIONS AND COMMITMENTS (15 minutes)

**Briefly review the five sessions in the study by asking participants the main points they remember and recording these on a whiteboard.**

### Session titles

1. Hearing the Call: Why are we called to care about our broken system?
2. Hearing the Voices: Who is crying out?
3. Hearing God's Call for Justice: How does God guide us to seek justice?
4. Hearing How to Respond Wisely: What are some models of ministry?
5. Hearing How to Make a Difference: How can we advocate for change?

Invite participants, working in pairs, to name a way they were "convicted" by this study about the ELCA social statement on criminal justice. Ask participants also to name one action on behalf of the voices crying out that they have learned about and think they could take. Each member of the pair writes down an action that they will fulfill, and the other member makes a promise to pray for that action.

**Optional:** The group as a whole could also create a covenant of next action steps together, and arrange for ways to follow up on this study.



SESSION FIVE: Hearing How To Make A Difference

Get Ready

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REVIEW AND CLOSING LITANY (15 minutes)

Review the main points you covered in Session Five: Hearing How to Make a Difference.

- 1. As Christians we are called to be advocates who speak with and for those who are marginalized.
2. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate who guides and encourages us to act.
3. The ELCA social statement names specific advocacy emphases.

Thank group members for attending the study sessions. Announce any follow-up plans.

Pray the closing litany:

Let us pray...

Men: We give thanks, gracious God, that victims' rights and needs are being raised.

Women: And we pray for congregations to reach out to victims and families of those incarcerated.

All: May we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Women: We give thanks for community-based alternatives to incarceration.

Men: And we pray for policy makers to limit the use of incarceration as a sanction for criminal offenses.

All: May we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Men: We give thanks for your law, O God, and for restorative justice that cares for all concerned.

Women: And we pray for the full reintegration of ex-offenders into community.

All: May we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

(More petitions can be added or written by class members.)

Thank group members for attending the study sessions. Announce any follow-up plans.



## Additional Resources

A very short and partial list of some [useful resources](#) for action and further information

[Glossary of common terms](#) related to criminal justice (This glossary of is made available from "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries.")

A primer "[About Social Statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)"

[A bibliography on criminal justice resources](#) from the National Council of Churches

A [illustrative graphic](#) on international and U.S. population rates from the International Center for Prison Studies: Prison Policy Initiative: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010)