



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

STUDY GUIDE

Faith Sexism and Justice

A Call to Action

Leader's Welcome

Welcome to the study guide for the ELCA social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*. Adopted by the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, this document relies on the Gospel promise of abundance, justice, and new creation in Christ to name the ways the sins of patriarchy and sexism harm *all* people, particularly women and girls, whatever their age or racial or gender identity. Drawing on Lutheran theology, the social statement teaches that God's people are called to resist sexism and pursue gender justice for others and for themselves.

Faith, Sexism, and Justice is the culmination of a seven-year process across the ELCA. Led by a national task force and supported by synod-based volunteers, the process of the social statement was like a long conversation among ELCA members. The social statement is designed to help people hear God's promise of abundant life and call for justice, see the complex harm caused by sexism, and pursue gender justice through personal and collective actions.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

**—John 10:10b, cited in
Faith, Sexism, and Justice, p. 15**



Leader's Welcome

THE CONTENT OF THE *FAITH, SEXISM, AND JUSTICE: A CALL TO ACTION* STUDY GUIDE

The six sessions in this study guide follow the path laid out in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

Session One:

All Are Called to Lives of Justice and Abundance

In this session participants hear the Scriptures' promise that God intends all people to experience justice and abundance in their lives.

Session Two:

Patriarchy and Sexism Cause Injustice for Everyone

In this session participants study sin from a Lutheran perspective and examine how the sins of patriarchy and sexism intertwine with other forms of oppression and injustice.

Session Three:

Language and Images for God Matter

In this session participants learn about the variety of images for God in the Scriptures and explore how inclusive and expansive language and images for God are consistent with Lutheran insights.

Session Four:

Creation Is Diverse, as Is the Body of Christ

In this session participants hear the Scriptures' affirmation of the diversity of all of God's creation and the New Testament's promise that the body of Christ is made up of members with a wide range of gifts, identities, and experiences.

Session Five:

Lutheran Insights Promote Gender Justice

In this session participants explore four Lutheran insights—theology of the cross, justification, Christian freedom, and neighbor justice—that empower ELCA members to resist sexism and work for gender justice.

Session Six:

God Calls Us to Action in Community

In this session participants connect neighbor justice to issues in their communities and discern how they might act in the public sphere for gender justice.

Though it is better to complete all six sessions in sequence, they can be completed in any order. If your community is engaging two sessions, starting with session one will introduce participants to the vision of the social statement.



Leader's Welcome

GUIDING HEALTHY CONVERSATIONS

As Lutheran Christians, we recognize that the Holy Spirit is present among us when we gather. We celebrate that God speaks to us through Word and Sacrament—through the Scriptures, the preached Word, baptism and holy communion, and through our words to one another. When we gather to study *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, we trust that God is moving among us as we encounter new ideas and share our beliefs and hopes for justice for neighbors and ourselves.

As you encounter new information and see Lutheran teachings brought to bear on issues related to patriarchy and sexism, pay close attention to how you feel. You might feel curious, anxious, or empowered. Encourage participants to be patient and compassionate as you share your views with others. The study guide addresses complex issues that may affect people in a variety of ways. Several of the sessions refer to difficult topics, such as gender-based violence, homophobia, and racism, which many people have experienced and may reexperience as they use the study guide materials. While leading these sessions, please be attentive to participants' discomforts and needs.

Here are some tips for leading the sessions:

- Speak only for yourself and avoid language that sounds accusatory or lumps people together, such as “those people” or “anyone who believes ...”
- Rather than defend your opinion, listen carefully to others and ask questions that help them express what they're thinking, such as “What's your perspective on ...?” or “How do you understand this?”
- You can also ask people to clarify what they've said by using statements such as “What I heard you saying is ...” or “Is that correct, or what you intended to say?”
- You may ask participants to honor the session as confidential and not share what others said.

Being attentive to your own feelings and listening closely to others will deepen the conversation and create an honest environment where a diversity of voices can be heard.

You may encounter terms that are new to you. Explore the glossary at the end of the social statement for definitions of the terms. (The glossary begins on p. 75.)



Leader's Welcome

DETAILS FOR LEADERS REGARDING THE STUDY GUIDE

Handouts: A handout is included for each session and can be found at the end of each session. A PDF containing all six handouts is available [here](#).

In-person or Virtual Gatherings: The six sessions in the study guide were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a way of making the study guide available remotely and for a wide variety of people, the activity section of each session can be offered in one of three ways. The session can be offered in person. Or you may use an online meeting platform for discussion only. Finally, you may use an online meeting platform that allows participants to post, view, and discuss their typed comments. If you offer the session virtually, it is a good idea to have an assistant manage the technology and the participants' posts so that you can focus on leading the activity or discussion. For tips on leading online sessions, see, for example, [Tips-for-Using-Zoom.pdf](#) (globallearningpartners.com).

Presenting the Digital Slides:

- To display the study guide slides, which are in PDF format, you will need to use a free PDF reader. Adobe Reader can be found at <https://get.adobe.com/reader/>.
- If you are using Windows 10, you can download a general PDF reader from the Windows store.
- With a PDF reader installed, download the study guide and double-click the file (in your "Downloads" folder) to open it.
- Then, display the slides so that one slide appears on the screen at a time. You may have to select full screen

mode or slide show from the "View" menu selection at the top left to configure this.

- The slides should then display so that either one mouse click or a tap of your space bar will advance to the next slide.

Reading Faith, Sexism, and Justice: Inspired by Martin Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism, the text was written in a dual format with a "short statement" and a "full statement." The full statement explains the content of the short statement with insights from Lutheran theology, the Scriptures, and current research to support the vision and content of the social statement.

Session Structure: The basic form of each study session should take about 45 minutes. The six sessions follow a similar structure and involve prayers, hearing from the social statement itself, watching and discussing a video, actively engaging the content of each session, and asking participants how they will live out the insights they have gained from the session. Each session also includes an optional Bible study and an optional conversation. The sessions can be extended to 60 or 90 minutes.

Spanish Resources: The social statement is [available](#) in Spanish (*Fe, sexismo y justicia: Un llamado a la acción*). A Spanish version of this study guide is expected on the ELCA website in the future. For the time being, if you are leading a session, please guide any Spanish-speaking participants to the Spanish version.

Videos for the Sessions: Each session has a video. The link for each video is in the individual session.

Citations and Sources: At the time of publication of this study guide in 2021, the URLs provided were live.



Session 3

Language and Images for God Matter

GETTING READY

In session two, participants explored how the sins of patriarchy and sexism are intertwined with other forms of oppression and injustice and how these sins are not only individual but also structural. In this third session, participants learn about inclusive and expansive language and images for God in the Scriptures. They also learn that inclusive and expansive language and images for God are consistent with Lutheran insights.

The full text of the social statement can be found here: in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#).

MANAGING THE TIME TOGETHER

The basic version of each session should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

If your group has 60 or 90 minutes, you can use the extra 15 or 30 minutes to do one or two of the following.

You can:

- explore the passages from the Scriptures, or
- engage the In the Coming Week activity, or
- reflect on the Continuing the Conversation prompts.

If the session is offered during a regularly scheduled 45-minute education gathering but you want to meet for a longer time, pause at 45 or 60 minutes and give people the chance to quietly leave the session.

ESTIMATED TIMELINE FOR THE BASIC 45-MINUTE SESSION

Welcome, Opening Prayer, Session Objectives, and Context (4 minutes)

Optional: Encounter the Scriptures (10-15 minutes)

Explore *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: Language and Images for God Matter* (5 minutes)

Engage Language and Images for God in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice* (10 minutes)

Sharing Stories Video: "Language and Images for God Matter" (11 minutes)

Discuss the Video (7 minutes)

Live Out the Social Statement's Call to Action (6 minutes)

Optional: In the Coming Week (10 minutes)

Optional: Continuing the Conversation (10-15 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)



Session 3

Language and Images for God Matter

OPTIONAL: SING TOGETHER

If you have 60 or 90 minutes, consider beginning and ending each session with a hymn. Try singing part of the hymn at the opening of the session and conclude with the rest of the hymn.

The hymns can be found in the following sources: *All Creation Sings* (ACS), *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW), *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (LLC), and *This Far by Faith* (TFF).

The following hymns resonate with the themes of session three:

- As a Mother Comforts Her Child, ACS 1015
- Bring Many Names, ACS 1094
- Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth, ELW 735
- ¿Quién eres Tú?, LLC 373
- Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud, ACS 947
- Thy Holy Wings, ELW 613
- Womb of Life and Source of Being, ACS 948

DISCUSSION/ACTIVITY SECTION

This session has three different options for the section titled Engage Inclusive and Expansive Language for God in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*. You can use the in-person, hands-on activity. Or you may use an online meeting platform for discussion only. Finally, you may use an online meeting platform that allows participants to submit and discuss their typed comments.

THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS ARE NEEDED FOR THE IN-PERSON SESSION:

- Bibles
- Access to hymns
- Print handouts for the participants, found at the end of this session. These include Bible references, quotes from *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, and other necessary materials.
- All the session handouts are also in one document at https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/FSJ_Study_Guide_Session_ALL.pdf.
- Sharing Stories Video: The URL for the video is provided in the session.
- Pen or marker for each participant
- One 3-by-5-inch note card for each participant

If your group chooses to encounter the Scriptures, consider four different methods to read the Bible: devotional, historical, literary, and Lutheran theological. For more on this fourfold approach to the Scriptures, see https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Book_Of_Faith_4_Methods.pdf.



Language and Images for God Matter

LEADER'S PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

Read the welcome to the **entire** study guide.

Read this study guide session.

You may want to have a paper copy with you when you lead the session.

Read pp. 22 and 24-26 and article 18, beginning on p. 42, in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

Preview the video. Bishop Ann Svennungsen and Pastor Bruce Berg served on the task force for *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*. In this video, they discuss their experiences, perspectives, and feelings about inclusive and expansive language and images for God. They connect God language to their work preaching, teaching, and providing pastoral care.

If you know who the participants will be before the session meets, consider sending them a welcome email. You can encourage participants to read article 18 on p. 6 in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*. Participants may also skim pp. 43-46 in the social statement.

Finally, you could ask participants to view the short video "What Do Lutherans Say About ... Gender Justice," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWIEKGIeQa0>.

Set up the space so that everyone can see the screen, and test the audio to be sure everyone can hear the Sharing Stories video.

Consider sending an email to participants a few days after the session to encourage them to complete one of the In the Coming Week activities.



Language and Images for God Matter

WELCOME AND CONTEXT (4 MINUTES)

The leader reads the following introduction to ELCA social statements.

ELCA social statements help us make sense of complex social and ethical concerns in our communities and the world, such as education and peace. These statements provide scriptural, theological, and contemporary insights about social issues. They govern the institutional witness of the ELCA and its teachings on social questions. ELCA social statements help communities and individuals think about, discuss together, and discern paths forward as we participate in God's work in the world. Many ELCA members are involved in creating social statements, and they are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.

OPENING PRAYER

The leader reads the following prayer aloud.

O God, Holy Spirit, bless the space between the words. Name it sacred. Open us beyond our immediate world to comprehend your promise that there are infinite ways to call upon you when we pray. We come in trust, resting in your grace. Amen.



Language and Images for God Matter

SESSION OBJECTIVES

Someone reads aloud.

We will review and respond to examples of the Bible's inclusive and expansive language for God.

We will learn why some people find exclusively male language for God to be harmful.

We will identify one action we can each take to encourage the use of inclusive and expansive language and images for God.

(In the 60 or 90 minute session, we will encounter the Scriptures' inclusive language and images for God.)



Language and Images for God Matter

OUR CONTEXT FOR SESSION THREE

The leader reads aloud.

Many Christians use exclusively masculine language for God. In the last 50 years, some Christians have said that exclusively male language and images for God—like king—make it hard for them to hear the Gospel. These Christians want to hear and experience God in language and images that are inclusive and expansive. They yearn to encounter God in ways that are not exclusively male-identified.

Some of the conversations about God language in recent decades have resulted in less exclusively masculine language in hymns and worship. For example, one ELCA worship resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, has fewer masculine pronouns for the Trinity than previous worship books did. *Faith, Sexism, and Justice* offers Lutherans a way to continue this important conversation. It connects God language to gender justice. The social statement exposes the truth that when God is understood primarily as a man in charge, our human relationships often follow this same patriarchal pattern.

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Language and Images for God Matter

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Faith, Sexism, and Justice encourages ELCA Lutherans to realize that inclusive and expansive language and images for God are in the Scriptures and part of the Lutheran tradition. In the Scriptures, God is referred to as a rock, a midwife, or a hen. These images are life-giving for many people. Martin Luther knew how important language was for faith. He wrote, “I don’t know what sort of power images have that they can so forcefully enter and affect one, and make everyone long to hear and speak in imagery.”¹ Making sure that the Gospel promise is in language that makes sense to people and affects them is part of the Lutheran tradition.



Language and Images for God Matter

OPTIONAL: ENCOUNTER THE SCRIPTURES (10-15 MINUTES)

Someone reads aloud.

In Isaiah 42, images for God alternate between typical masculine and feminine images, such as a soldier and a woman giving birth.

Read Isaiah 42:13-14.

Someone else reads aloud.

But then in Chapter 46, it is as if God says something like, “You know what? You cannot compare me to anyone or anything that you know! I am beyond human understanding.” Read Isaiah 46:3-9.

Spend one minute in silence, reflecting on these passages from the Scriptures.

Then choose two of the following questions and discuss them for 10 minutes. You may want to break people into groups of three or four to give everyone the chance to contribute.

- A** What demands or challenges do I hear in these passages?
- B** What is God up to in these Scripture readings?
- C** What do you notice about idols in this passage?
- D** Why do you think God is speaking as if God is both male and female?



Language and Images for God Matter

EXPLORE *FAITH, SEXISM, AND JUSTICE*: LANGUAGE AND IMAGES FOR GOD MATTER (5 MINUTES)

Someone reads aloud from *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

“The Christian tradition confesses that God is infinite mystery beyond human comprehension. Human language and human concepts about God are never enough to know God.” (FSJ, p. 44)

Someone else reads aloud from *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

“Insistence on predominantly male-oriented language and images restricts our understanding of God, who is beyond gender, to one human category. ... The use of only male language leads us to forget the incomprehensible mystery of God and can reduce the living God to an understanding of God to the figure of an infinitely powerful man.” (FSJ, p. 44)

Someone else reads aloud from *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

“[I]nsisting on only male language ... can persuade Christians that men have more in common with God than women do and thus that maleness is a higher form of humanity.” (FSJ, 44)

Spend one minute in silence to reflect on the words from the social statement.



Language and Images for God Matter

ENGAGE INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE FOR GOD IN *FAITH, SEXISM, AND JUSTICE* (10 MINUTES)

In-person Activity

If meeting in-person, distribute the handouts.

Read a few of the Bible verses on the handout. While you read, circle the images of God that comfort you. Put a square around those that make you feel awkward.

Working in groups of three, take six minutes to share your answers to these prompts:

- A** Discuss why certain images comfort you. Discuss why certain images make you feel awkward.
- B** Biblical authors used images from their times to worship and proclaim God. What images from our times might we use to worship and proclaim God in inclusive and expansive ways?



Language and Images for God Matter

Virtual Activity

The leader should moderate the discussion to ensure that everyone gets the chance to contribute. Participants can be put in small groups of three or four.

Using a shared electronic document or online meeting platform, ask each participant to post their answers to the following prompts. You may use a chat function, or a shared document, or a platform to have participants post their responses.

STEP ONE

Post the following verses in a shared document so that everyone can read them on their own.

“You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.” (Deuteronomy 32:18)

God says, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:13)

Jesus says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37)



Language and Images for God Matter

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ... Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:4, 8)

STEP TWO

Post which images comfort you. Post which images make you feel awkward.

STEP THREE

Discuss the following question: Biblical authors used images from their times to worship and proclaim God. Post or share what images from our times we might use to worship and proclaim God in inclusive and expansive ways.



Language and Images for God Matter

Virtual Discussion Questions

The leader should moderate the discussion to ensure that everyone gets the chance to contribute.

Someone reads the following texts aloud.

- Deuteronomy 32:18
- Isaiah 66:13
- Matthew 23:37
- Luke 15:4, 8

Discuss why certain images comfort you. Discuss why certain images make you feel awkward.

Biblical authors used images from their times to worship and proclaim God. What images from our times might we use to worship and proclaim God in inclusive and expansive ways?



Language and Images for God Matter

SHARING STORIES VIDEO: "LANGUAGE AND IMAGES FOR GOD MATTER" (11 MINUTES)

The link to the video for this session is <https://vimeo.com/471449111/89f4d6e291>.

DISCUSS THE VIDEO (7 MINUTES)

After viewing the video, discuss one of the following questions. You may want to break into groups of three or four to give everyone the chance to contribute.

- A** What did Bishop Svennungsen and Pastor Berg say in the video that was useful to you, and why was it useful?
- B** What one thing did Bishop Svennungsen or Pastor Berg say that could help your worshiping community use inclusive and expansive language and images for God?
- C** The video featured 11 visual images. Which images affected you the most? Why?

***"Holy Divinity has lost her coins,
and it is us!"***

(St. Augustine of Hippo, based on Luke 15:8)



Language and Images for God Matter

LIVE OUT THE SOCIAL STATEMENT'S CALL TO ACTION (6 MINUTES)

During the Session

Choose one of the following activities to work on in pairs.

- A** On a note card, write two or three sentences about one thing that surprised you in this session. Have either the session facilitator or someone else collect these cards to share with your pastor or other congregational leaders. (You could also do this action in an email.)
- B** Commit yourself to using inclusive language for humans or for God this week. Write on a note for yourself (paper or electronic) and be precise. For example, “I will refer to God as she or rock or hen all week.” At the end of the week, share this experience with someone else.
- C** Was there a point in today’s session when you became aware of any beliefs, assumptions, or attitudes that you hold that might prevent you from using inclusive and expansive language for God?



Language and Images for God Matter

OPTIONAL: IN THE COMING WEEK (10 MINUTES)

Take a few minutes to read the optional activities below. Next, select one of these activities that you will pursue. Then reach out to another participant and agree to check in later in the week to discuss what you did to foster inclusive and expansive language for God.

- A** Send a message (handwritten or electronic) with one of today's passages from the Scriptures to someone who was not at the session. Tell them why it matters to you and invite them into a conversation about this passage.
- B** Go through your congregation's worship bulletin, website, or building and look at what they communicate about God and humans (gender, race and ethnicity, age, ability, etc.).

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- C** Read Implementing Resolution #8 (*Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, p. 82), which calls on bishops, synods, and the churchwide organization to use gender-inclusive and expansive language for God. Identify one way you can support this commitment.
- D** Read *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, article 18, beginning at p. 42. Circle words or phrases that catch your attention.
- E** Investigate the resources in the Explore section at the end of this session.



Language and Images for God Matter

OPTIONAL: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION (10-15 MINUTES)

Discuss two of the prompts below.

- A** What fills me with hope or delights me in this session about inclusive and expansive language for God?
- B** What challenges me or confuses me in this session about inclusive and expansive language for God?
- C** In your community and congregation, who are the neighbors who need to hear that inclusive and expansive language for God matters? What have these neighbors said they need?
- D** Biblical authors used images from their times to worship and proclaim God. What images from our times might we use to worship and proclaim God in inclusive and expansive ways?

“A mother can hold her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother, Jesus, can lead us in friendly fashion into his blessed breast by means of his sweet open side.”

(Julian of Norwich, “Revelations of Divine Love,” Chapter 6, para. 6, based on Isaiah 46:3-4; 49:15)



Language and Images for God Matter

CLOSING PRAYER (2 MINUTES)

Mothering God, you are here. Thank you for revealing yourself in many ways. We grasp at words to contain you, but none can hold all that you are. Let us always call to you in ways that give breath to your faithful justice and your love for all. Moved by the Spirit, we pray. Amen.



End Notes

URLs were accessed between June and December 2021.

Session One:

All Are Called to Lives of Justice and Abundance

1. “Gender-based Violence” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), 18, https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.
2. “Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America,” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, April 2018, <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/VoYC-LGBTQ-Brief-Chapin-Hall-2018.pdf>.
3. “Racial and Ethnic Disparities Continue in Pregnancy-Related Deaths,” Center for Disease Control, September 5, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>.

Session Two:

Patriarchy and Sexism Cause Injustice for Everyone

1. *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, (1991), <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society>.
2. Johnson, Allan G., “The Tree as Metaphor,” *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), <https://www.agjohnson.us/essays/tree>.
3. “45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women: Executive Summary—Clergy Questionnaire Report 2015” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/45th_Anniversary_of_the_Ordination_Women_Ordained_Full_Report.pdf.
4. “Thursdays in Black,” World Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black>.

Session Three:

Language and Images for God Matter

1. Luther, Martin, “Against Latomus, 1521,” LW 32:196.



End Notes

Session Four:

Creation Is Diverse, as Is the Body of Christ

1. Hess, Cynthia, et al., "Providing Unpaid Household and Care Work in the United States: Uncovering Inequality," Institute for Women's Policy Research, <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IWPR-Providing-Unpaid-Household-and-Care-Work-in-the-United-States-Uncovering-Inequality.pdf>.
2. Sears, Brad, and Christy Mallory, "Documented Evidence of Employment Discrimination and Its Effects on LGBT People," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, July 2011, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/employ-discrim-effect-lgbt-people/>.
3. "Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ People From Accessing Health Care," Center for American Progress, Jan. 18, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2018/01/18/445130/discrimination-prevents-lgbtq-people-accessing-health-care/>.
4. ELCA Office of the Secretary, August 2015.
5. "Suicide and Violence Prevention," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/msmhealth/suicide-violence-prevention.htm>.

Session Five:

Lutheran Insights Promote Gender Justice

1. Parish, Anja, "Gender-based Violence Against Women: Both Cause for Migration and Risk Along the Journey," Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 7, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gender-based-violence-against-women-both-cause-migration-and-risk-along-journey>.
2. Wallace, Beverly R., "Silent Voices, Still ... but Faith ... Lifting Up the Voices of the Daughters of Hagar in 'Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action,'" *Currents in Theology and Mission*, April 2020, <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/235/260>.

Session Six:

God Calls Us to Action in Community

1. "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths—United States, 2007-2016," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Sept. 6, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6835a3.htm>.



Glossary from Faith, Sexism, and Justice

Androcentric: Male-centered, focused on men.

Binary (Gender Binary): The concept that there are only two genders, man or woman, which are inherently distinct and “opposite.”

Complementary/Complementarity: The belief that God gave men and women inherently different roles and purposes that complement each other to mutual benefit. Men’s roles have often related to leadership and decision-making; women’s roles have included obeying males and caring for others. These roles are informed by the structural dynamic of dominance (male) and submission (female). The imbalance of power in the relationship contributes to male privilege.

Domestic violence: See entry for “Gender-based violence.”

Equality: The idea that people have the same rights and should receive the same resources. Equality can refer to the equal worth of all people or to people having equal experiences of their rights and their potential in life.

Equity: Fair treatment of people according to their needs.

The principle of equity takes into account that people exist on inherently uneven playing fields due to poverty, sexism, racism, etc. Because of these different contexts, individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do (such as having a choice of quality doctors, careers, neighborhoods, etc.).

The goal of equity is to ensure each person receives what each person needs to flourish and is not disadvantaged.

Ex. A simple example of equality in public restrooms would be having changing tables in all restrooms, because male caregivers may also need a space to change diapers. A simple example of equity in public restrooms would be putting more stalls in women’s restrooms in order to serve the specific needs women have.

Expansive language: Language (or imagery) referring to God that is not limited to humanity or human categories: water, a rock, a hiding place, a mighty fortress, etc. See “inclusive language.”

Gender: Identities, roles, behaviors, and attributes that cultures, societies, and individuals shape, most often linked to femininity and masculinity. The most common gender identities are woman/girl and man/boy, but other identities exist. For more, see “gender non-conforming.”

Gender identity: How a person understands one’s own gender; one’s internal sense of one’s gender.

Gender justice: Gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations for people of all genders to live into their individual callings. Gender justice is sought by eliminating power imbalances among people at individual and societal levels, as well as eliminating discrimination against women and people who do not adhere to stereotypes associated with men and women.



Glossary from Faith, Sexism, and Justice

Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer:

Words that people who do not identify as “men” or “women” use to describe their gender (not sexuality). Their gender identity and/or biological characteristics may not completely fit with the dominant and expected ways of acting as, or being, a man or woman or a boy or girl. Each term might be used differently by different people, as an umbrella term or as a specific label for their gender identity. This document uses all three terms in an effort to be inclusive. (Terminology will change over time. Readers are referred to contemporary communities for up-to-date language.) For more, see “gender,” “intersex,” “transgender,” and “queer.”

Gender-based violence: Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons, including but not limited to intimate-partner violence and domestic violence. This can include such things as catcalling women or bullying boys who are not perceived as “man enough.” Perpetrators commit gender-based violence to assert power over someone.

Genderqueer: See “Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer.”

Hierarchy: A system in which groups are ranked and certain groups have power over other groups. Sometimes this power over others leads to more value being assigned to the group or individuals with dominance.

Human trafficking: Coercion, abduction, and/or imprisonment of people for forced labor, often of a sexual nature. This problem is pervasive around the world, including in the U.S. Also known as modern-day slavery.

Inclusive language: Language that includes all genders when referring to humanity or God, for instance, using humans or humankind to talk about humanity, rather than man or mankind. See “expansive language.”

Intersecting, intersectionality: Humans have multiple aspects to their identities, including gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, social class, etc. These aspects of human identities are tied to systemic privilege and oppression; gender is tied to sexism, ethnicity is tied to racism, etc. Intersectionality describes the ways different forms of discrimination and systemic oppression affect each other and shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. All human identities and all forms of privilege and oppression are made up of many intersections.

Ex. A woman of African descent may have a Ph.D. and make a healthy salary, but she will still suffer from racism and sexism. However, she would experience that racism and sexism differently from how a man of African descent, a white woman, or an impoverished person might experience them. The injustices she faces, therefore, may have solutions different from those for other people.



Glossary from Faith, Sexism, and Justice

Intersex: As described by the Intersex Society of North America, a term for a variety of conditions people are born with: physical characteristics, anatomy, and/or genes that vary from standards set by doctors' expectations for being "female" or "male." The term refers to the fact of biological variation among humans. Some people identify as intersex, rather than using the term solely to refer to a condition; others may also identify as gender non-conforming or a similar term.

Justice: Generally, justice refers to an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment, and reciprocity. This statement emphasizes the aspects of justice that include fair and equal treatment under the law, ending oppression based on power differences, and, as emphasized in the Bible, a right relationship with God and within community.

Neighbor justice: A term proposed in this social statement that is rooted in the biblical directive to "love your neighbor as yourself." This term expresses the idea that faith is active in love and love necessarily calls for justice in relationships and in the structures of society. Neighbor justice is meeting neighbors' needs across the globe and in our local communities.

Non-binary: See "Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer."

Objectification: Thinking of or portraying people as objects, erasing their humanity, emotions, and rights.

Ex. Catcalling, advertisements that use sexualized images to sell merchandise, and stories in which female characters exist only as props for male characters.

Patriarchy: A social system that enables men to have more power than, and power over, women and people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. A patriarchal social system is dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men's actions, voices, and authority. In various ways, this kind of social system operates to control women, girls, and people who do not fit society's predominant ideas of maleness and masculinity.

Privilege: This term refers to the relationships between groups of people in society, to the social advantage or special treatment of a group or persons in a group. This advantage is unearned and results from how a group's identity is perceived as "normal" or "better." Privilege is lived out on an individual and societal scale. Privilege is not something a person deliberately opts into or out of, nor is it experienced by everyone in the same ways.

Ex. A man benefits from male privilege when his opinion is subconsciously valued more highly in a meeting, when he is paid more for equal work, or when he walks down a street without harassment or fear of sexual assault. White people benefit from white privilege when they can shop without being followed or monitored by staff who think they may shoplift, or when the majority of heroes in textbooks and movies look like them. For a white male, the combination of white privilege and male privilege can work together. A white man may have fewer risk factors for some stress-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes, while his complaints of pain are more likely to be taken seriously by his doctor. For more, see "intersectionality."



Glossary from Faith, Sexism, and Justice

Queer: Umbrella term regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation, often used by individuals who identify as somehow “other” from society’s sexual, romantic, or gender norms.

Although historically used in a derogatory manner, the term has since been reclaimed as a positive label by some members within that community.

Rape culture: An environment in which the objectification of and assault on human bodies, particularly in a sexual way, is normalized and tolerated. Rape culture primarily harms women and girls. Blaming rape victims for their assaults and maintaining a biased justice system are both parts of rape culture and how it is propagated.

Reproductive health care: Health services related to the reproductive system at all stages of life for all genders, including the menstrual cycle, fertility, and cancer.

Sex (biological): A scientific label assigned at birth that describes an individual’s reproductive organs and whether they have XX chromosomes (female) or XY chromosomes (male). People whose biology varies from standards set by doctors’ expectations of being “female” or “male” are typically called “intersex.” Biological sex characteristics and traits of people who are said to be female or male are also variable.

Sexism: Refers to what supports male privilege and reinforces prejudice and discrimination against women and girls due to their gender and against people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. Human actions and speech can be sexist, as can institutions, policies, and practices.

Sexuality: A complex individual and social concept. Individually, sexuality includes the romantic and/or sexual feelings and desires that a person experiences. People’s sexuality is also influenced by the social and cultural forces in which they find themselves.

Toxic masculinity: Refers to forms of masculinity that emphasize aggression, power, and control and sometimes violent or unhealthy sexuality. It deemphasizes weakness, caring, and vulnerability. Masculinity itself is not harmful; however, it is described as toxic when these forms of masculinity cultivate harm to self, others, and society. Toxic masculinity limits the humanity and compassion of men.

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender is different from the sex assigned or identified at birth. Some transgender individuals identify as men or as women; others don’t identify with one of those words. Some people use this term to describe their identity; for others it serves as an umbrella term. Over time its meaning may change as language evolves. See “gender non-conforming.”



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Authors

Mary Elise Lowe, Ph.D.
Mary J. Streufert, Ph.D.

Contributor

Heather A. Dean

Videos

Pastor Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld
William Rodriguez, Ph.D.
W. Bradley Wendel, J.D.
Pastor Bruce Berg
Bishop Ann Svennungsen
Sister Clare Josef-Maier
Caryn Riswold, Ph.D.
Jennifer DeLeon

Prayers

Pastor Lori Kochanski

Graphic Design

Kathryn Hillert Brewer

Videographers

Brett Nelson
Will Nunnally

Production Manager

Reva Hardina

Proofreader

James Jones

Reviewers

Deacon Jennifer Baker-Trinity
Diane Jacobson, Ph.D.
Kathryn A. Kleinhans, Ph.D.
Kathryn Lohre
Jeannette Romkema
Pastor Bradley Schmeling
Pastor Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld
Deacon John Weit
Roger Willer, Ph.D.
Marty Wyatt



Language and Images for God Matter

EXPLORE FAITH, SEXISM, AND JUSTICE: A CALL TO ACTION

“The Christian tradition confesses that God is infinite mystery beyond human comprehension. Human language and human concepts about God are never enough to know God.” (FSJ, p. 44)

“Insistence on predominantly male-oriented language and images restricts our understanding of God, who is beyond gender, to one human category. . . . The use of only male language leads us to forget the incomprehensible mystery of God and can reduce the living God to an understanding of God to the figure of an infinitely powerful man.” (FSJ, p. 44)

“[I]nsisting on only male language can make maleness itself a false idol. It can persuade Christians that men have more in common with God than women do and thus that maleness is a higher form of humanity.” (FSJ, p. 44)

Participants are encouraged to read article 18, which begins at p. 42 of *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*.

ENCOUNTER THE SCRIPTURES

In Isaiah 42, images for God alternate between typical masculine and feminine images, such as a soldier and a woman giving birth. (Isaiah 42:13-14)

But then in Chapter 46, it is as if God says something like, “You know what? You cannot compare me to anyone or anything that you know! I am beyond human understanding.” (Isaiah 46:3-9)

RESOURCES

Documents and history for *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* can be found at <https://www.elca.org/womenandjustice>.

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action can be found at https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf.

Fe, sexismo y justicia: Un llamado a la acción can be found at https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Fe_sexismo_y_justicia.pdf.

The study guide for *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* can be found at: <https://www.elca.org/fsjstudyguide>.

The video for session three, “Language and Images for God Matter,” can be found at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8989135/video/471449111>.



Language and Images for God Matter

ACTIVITY

The following passages use inclusive and expansive language and images for God.

Moses proclaims to all of Israel: “As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided [Jacob]; no foreign god was with him.” (Deuteronomy 32:11-12)

“You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.” (Deuteronomy 32:18)

“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.” (Psalm 32:7)

“As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.” (Psalm 123:2)

God says: “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept myself still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant.” (Isaiah 42:14)

God says: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:13)

God says about Israel: “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” (Hosea 11:3-4)



The LORD says to Israel of those who are wayward, “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them.” (Hosea 13:8)

Jesus says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37)

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ... Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:4, 8)



Language and Images for God Matter

IN THE COMING WEEK

- A** Send a message (handwritten or electronic) with one of today's passages from the Scriptures to someone who was not at the session. Tell them why it matters to you and invite them into a conversation about this passage.
- B** Go through your congregation's worship bulletin, website, or building and look at what they communicate about God and humans (gender, race and ethnicity, age, ability, etc.).
- C** Read Implementing Resolution #8 (*Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, p. 82), which calls on bishops, synods, and the churchwide organization to use gender-inclusive and expansive language for God. Identify one way you can support this commitment.
- D** Read *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, Article 18, beginning at p. 42. Circle words or phrases that catch your attention.
- E** Investigate the resources in the Explore section at the end of this session.

If You Want to Know More About Inclusive and Expansive Language for God,

EXPLORE ...

... **ELCA worship resources with expansive and inclusive language and images**, see *All Creation Sings: Evangelical Lutheran Worship Supplement* (Augsburg Fortress, 2020). It includes a catalog of images for God from the Scriptures, with a selection of 100 images from the New Revised Standard Version. See an article highlighting this new resource and its connection to *Faith, Sexism, and Justice* here: <https://blogs.elca.org/worship/2688/>.

... **how language shapes worship**, see "Language and the Christian Assembly" in *Principles for Worship* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002), https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Principles_for_Worship.pdf.

... **Lutheran interpretation of the Bible**, see session seven of "Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement," 2016, available in pdf at <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Justice-for-Women>.

... **the global links between theology and patriarchy**, read the Lutheran World Federation document "'It will not be so among you!' A Faith Reflection on Women and Power," esp. pp. 27-34, at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-it-will-not-be-so-among-you-faith-reflection-gender-and-power>.

... **biblical female images of God**, watch Elizabeth A. Johnson at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkGM8rWVF80>.

... **God as Mother in the Scriptures and how biblical translation matters**, watch Wil Gafney at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLfpaRhsSUI>.

... **Lutheran perspectives in the dialogue about language for God**, read the article "Magnifying the Mystery" by Gail Ramshaw, published in *Currents in Theology and Mission* (March 2020), <https://www.currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/231>, and read the special issue on God language in *Currents in Theology and Mission* (June 2016), <https://www.currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/issue/view/4>.

... **how one womanist theologian explores language for God**, read the article "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices" by Delores S. Williams, published in *Christianity and Crisis* (March 1987), <https://www.religion-online.org/article/womanist-theology-black-womens-voices/>.

... **the ecumenical and scholarly conversation on this topic**, read the book *Quest for the Living God* by Elizabeth A. Johnson, published by Continuum (2008).

