



ISSUE PAPER

Policies and Procedures

BACKGROUND

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) gives expression to this church's concern for corporate social responsibility — both in its internal activities and in its interaction with society — through exercising its rights as a corporate shareholder on issues of social concern. This is accomplished through screening stock ownership, casting shareholder ballots, filing shareholder resolutions, and dialogue with corporations. For the churchwide organization and for separately incorporated ministries, the ELCA makes recommendations regarding shareholder action. Individual Lutherans and other organizations are encouraged to apply these recommendations within their own portfolios.

In determining the actions to take or recommend, the ELCA draws on the foundation of its social policy. This policy consists of social statements, social messages, and churchwide assembly and Church Council social policy resolutions, and reflects an understanding of this church's social responsibility, which includes theological, social and ethical considerations.

The issues brought to the ELCA regarding corporate social responsibility are complex, and the possible responses are multidimensional. In November 2003, the ELCA Church Council put in place a process for writing and approving an issue paper that addresses a concern within society that may require action by the ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility program. Issue papers interpret the social teaching of this church as they relate to investments.

A standard format for an issue paper includes:

1. Overview of the problem/issue in society.
2. Review of ELCA social policy surrounding the issue.
3. Proposals outlining how corporations and others might play a role in the solution to the issue (including a sample list of specific companies or sectors of industry that might be approached).
4. Identification of any screens the ELCA would implement.
5. The boundaries of resolved clauses that the ELCA would endorse.

The Corporate Social Responsibility review team will coordinate the writing and revision process for developing issue papers.

Corporate Social Responsibility in the ELCA uses the tools of screening of investments, shareholder advocacy and community investing to work with corporations, calling them to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities.

More at ELCA.org/CSR.

I. NEW ISSUE PAPERS

From time to time, the ELCA may wish to develop a new corporate social responsibility issue paper. Sometimes a complex issue arises that cannot be covered by an existing paper or a revision of a current issue paper. This situation would trigger development of a new paper. In addition, when each new ELCA social statement is approved, a review of all issue papers will be made to see if revisions to current issue papers are needed or if a new issue paper needs to be developed in light of the new social statement. The authority to commission a new paper resides with the Church Council, the Conference of Bishops or the Administration team of the ELCA.

New issue papers will be drafted with input from staff of Portico Benefit Services, Portico's Investment and Corporate Social Responsibility Committee, the director for theological ethics and other appropriate ELCA staff. Depending on the topic, others, including outside experts, may be consulted for input and advice. When a new issue paper is refined and authorized by the executive director of the Service and Justice unit of the churchwide organization, it will be taken to the Conference of Bishops for advice and forwarded to the Church Council for consideration and approval.

II. REVIEW AND REVISION OF EXISTING ISSUE PAPERS

In order to assure timely review and revision of approved issue papers, the following guidelines will apply:

1. Issue papers will be reviewed at least every four years. The review will include research on the background materials and current ELCA social policy and will confirm or modify all web links in the document. Approval for these revisions will be treated in the same way as a new issue paper and, therefore, will be forwarded to the executive director of the Service and Justice unit for authorization, to the Conference of Bishops for advice and to the Church Council for approval.
2. Nonsubstantive revisions of issue papers may be approved at any time by the executive director of the Service and Justice unit, and revisions will be included in the annual Corporate Social Responsibility report. (Examples may include such items as grammar, web link substitutions, name changes, items approved on one paper that should apply to all issue papers, etc.).
3. When additional resolution guidelines to support an issue are needed, they may be made at the recommendation of the Corporate Social Responsibility review team to the executive director of the Service and Justice unit for approval, provided that they are consistent with the original issue papers approved by the ELCA Church Council.
4. If substantive changes to an issue paper need to be made, the matter will be treated as a new paper and forwarded to the executive director of the Service and Justice unit for authorization, for advice from the Conference of Bishops, and for approval by the Church Council. Annual reports, including all resolutions that have been approved and/or filed, as well as information regarding ongoing dialogues, will be prepared by the corporate social responsibility consultant and shared with the ELCA Church Council, the Conference of Bishops and Portico, and may be shared with any ELCA-related organization or with others.

APPROVED by the Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, May 24, 2007

APPROVED by Church Council, April 2012 (CC12.04.09)

APPROVED by the ELCA Church Council, November 2016 [CC16.11.46n]

CONGRUENCY REVIEW APPROVED by CSR Review Team, Sept. 21, 2021