



VIOLENCE IN OUR WORLD

Issue Paper

BACKGROUND

The ELCA's social teaching around citizenship gives all citizens the responsibility "to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being, and good order in public life."¹ As part of that understanding, this church has consistently supported efforts, whether community-based, national or global, to protect human rights and recognize the inherent dignity of every person.

Christians are called both to proclaim the gospel of God's final peace and to work for earthly peace, understanding earthly peace as "relationships among and within nations that are just, harmonious, and free from war."² Earthly peace is fleeting and can be disrupted in many ways.

Violence is rightly understood as physical confrontation but can also be understood more broadly. For instance, ELCA social teaching on gender-based violence has described violence as harm directed at a person or group in order to maintain power and control. It can be inflicted in many forms — social, physical and emotional — and thus we may recognize that violence is more than armed conflict between two nation-states. Violence pervades all aspects of life in our world. Intersecting identities such as ethnicity, immigration status, sexuality, economic means, age and level of education all render people more or less vulnerable to personal and systemic violence. It is not only the immediate victims of violence who suffer: the message on gun violence details how the communal trauma initiated by gun violence spreads and perpetuates harm.

This issue paper addresses issues of violence and trauma related to armed conflict, such as antipersonnel landmines and other weapons with indiscriminate effects, as well as gun violence and nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. The ELCA's peace statement calls the people of this church as peacemakers to advocate for "an earthly peace that provides security from violence and aggression, seeks just order in place of tyranny or anarchy, checks unrestrained power, and defends and enhances the life of people who are poor and powerless."³ In keeping with a broadened understanding of violence, this paper also addresses community violence, sexual

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.

1 *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (ELCA social statement, 1991), 5.

2 *For Peace in God's World* (ELCA social statement, 1999), 1.

3 *Ibid*, 7.

exploitation, gun safety, and workplace violence and harassment.

ELCA SOCIAL POLICY

Historically the Lutheran Church — the ELCA and its predecessor church bodies — has been committed to the support of human rights and the struggle against injustice. In terms of global issues of human rights, the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* (1995) and the ELCA social message “[Human Rights](#)” (2017) call for respect and dignity for each person. The church is meant to be a disturbing, reconciling and deliberating presence in word and deed in order to create an environment conducive to peace. The statement on peace develops the global perspective for individuals and our church body to join with others in searching for what makes for peace.

In terms of domestic issues of violence, the ELCA Church Council has also adopted messages that pertain to particular expressions of violence. The 1994 message “[Community Violence](#)” deals with such issues as the proliferation of guns and the culture of violence. Depictions of violence in the media and mediation toward just and peaceful solutions to conflict are also addressed. The 2001 message “[Commercial Sexual Exploitation](#)” examines pornography and sex trafficking, calling the church to look at corporations whose earnings come from making and selling pornography or from promoting or profiting from the pornography industry. The 2009 social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* characterizes the misuse and abuse of sexuality for profit as always wrong. The 2015 social message “[Gender-based Violence](#)” understands violence as an abusive exercise of power for the sake of control. Gender-based violence is perpetrated through means such as media portrayals of women as objects, sexual exploitation, economic subjugation and legal bias, and across intersecting identities such as race, sexual orientation and age. The 2024 social message “Gun-related Violence and Trauma” “expands moral responsibility”⁴ for gun-related violence and challenges the broader community, including private enterprise, to view reduction of gun-related violence as a shared responsibility. In this framework, the ELCA advocates that gun manufacturers, distributors and sellers embrace practices (e.g. in design and marketing) that will minimize the harm guns can cause and foster greater public safety. ELCA Churchwide Assembly actions have included other issues relating to violence.

CORPORATE RESPONSE

These issues address the variety of aspects of violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social, both internationally and domestically. In order to counter the culture of violence that pervades the national culture and media in this country, all of our society — including the corporate world — must find creative ways to work toward peace and nonviolence and reduction of traumatic events. Sometimes it is simple, such as a corporation having a policy not to display guns and ammunition in family-friendly areas. Other times, especially when human rights, national security and weapons are involved, it is more complex.

4 Ibid, 7.

RECOMMENDED by Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, January. 22, 2004

ENDORSED by Division for Church in Society Board, February 27, 2004

APPROVED by Church Council, April 16-18, 2004

UPDATED by Advisory Committee for Corporate Social Responsibility, January 11, 2008

APPROVED by Church Council, April 2008 [CC08.04.XXa]

APPROVED by Church Council, November 11, 2012 [CC12.11.44w]

UPDATED by the Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team October 4, 2019.

APPROVED by Church Council, November 2019 [CC19.11.47i]

UPDATED by Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team, October 2024 [anticipated]

APPROVED by Church Council, November 2024 [CC 21.11.201]

The call to corporations is to recognize their role in the problem and to work to become part of the solution.

SOCIAL CRITERIA INVESTMENT SCREENS

The social criteria investment [screen on military weapons](#), revised and approved by the Church Council in 2014, responds to this issue. The social criteria investment [screen on gambling](#), revised and approved by the Church Council in 2016, responds to this issue. The social criteria investment [screen on pornography](#), revised and approved by the Church Council in 2013, responds to this issue. The social criteria investment screen on human rights, approved by the Church Council in 2018, responds to this issue. The guidelines here gather each of these for this issue paper.

RESOLUTION GUIDELINES FOR ELCA

1. We support requests to establish policies renouncing involvement in the production, sale and use of antipersonnel landmines, cluster bombs, autonomous weapons systems and other weapons with indiscriminate effects.
2. We support requests to establish policies renouncing involvement in the production, sale and use of biological and chemical weapons.
3. We support reports describing involvement in the use of depleted uranium.
4. We support requests for reports describing involvement in the production of nuclear weapons.
5. We support reports concerning involvement in space-based weapons.
6. We support adoption of policies that impose restrictions upon financing transactions directly pertaining to the trade or manufacturing of antipersonnel land mines, cluster munitions, biological weapons, chemical weapons or nuclear weapons (controversial weapons), and investments in companies that generate revenue from controversial weapons.
7. We support reports on the company's due diligence process to identify and address environmental and social risks related to financing companies that produce controversial weapons or with business activities in conflict-affected and high-risk areas.
8. We support reports on the risk associated with the processing of payments involving a company's cards or its electronic payment system services for the sale and purchase of untraceable firearms, including "buy, build, shoot" firearm kits, components or accessories used to assemble privately made firearms known as ghost guns.
9. We support requests to establish policies to make arms sales open to public scrutiny and reduce the arms trade, including reports on foreign sales of weapons-related products and services.
10. We support requests for formal written workplace antiviolence policies.

11. We support independent review of the impact of company policies and practices on workplace safety and violence, including gun violence.
12. We support requests for reports on policies and procedures aimed at stemming gun violence, increasing gun safety and mitigating harm associated with gun products.
13. We support requests to embrace structures or practices that reduce tragic, irresponsible or illegal use of firearms.
14. We support requests for manufacturers, sellers and distributors of firearms to monitor how their products are used. We support requests to uphold preventive safety norms and practices.
15. We support requests to report involvement in the pornography industry and policies to reduce involvement.
16. We support requests to disclose policies aimed at stemming the production and sale of violent video media, including video games.
17. We support policies (including reports on such policies) aimed to eliminate exploitation, whether through slavery, human trafficking or sexual exploitation, especially of minors.
18. We support reports on policies to address the negative effects of gambling and programs to assist individuals who have a gambling addiction.
19. We support reports that address the possible negative effects of any policies that may preclude due process on harassment and discrimination.
20. We support assessments of risk in conflict-affected areas (see human rights issue paper).

RESOLUTION GUIDELINES FOR ELCA - GENERAL

We support practices of good governance, specifically:

- A company having an independent board chair or independent lead director.
- Reports on policies and procedures for political contributions and expenditures (both direct and indirect) made with corporate funds.
- Reports on any portion of any dues or similar payments made to any tax-exempt organization that is used for an expenditure or contribution that might be deemed political.
- Guidelines or policies governing the company's political contributions and expenditures.
- Reports on diversity for corporate boards and upper-level management.