

“GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE”

Study Guide for Participants



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



“Gender-based Violence” Study Guide for Participants

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for engaging with this study guide for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s social message on “Gender-based Violence.”¹ These materials are intended for use alongside the social message. This social message was adopted by the 2015 Church Council to address the issue of gender-based violence and to guide the ELCA’s response to gender-based violence.

By experiencing these sessions together, you are engaging with the wider church and affirming the ELCA’s decision to speak out against gender-based violence. In doing so, you are participating in God’s call to serve others by addressing gender-based violence. As you use this study guide to learn and reflect together, you are already beginning to make a difference in the world.

This study guide is intended for groups of teenagers and young adults but is welcome to be used by groups of all appropriate ages. Given the difficult nature of the topic of gender-based violence, some of this material may be challenging for participants and leaders alike. Please be mindful of the sensitive nature of the statistics and stories found within the materials, as well as the experiences and feelings that may resurface. God calls us to care for one another in tough moments like these; please consider ways to support survivors and victims of gender-based violence when possible.

May the use of this study guide be nourishing to your group and may God strengthen church and society alike to eradicate the evils of gender-based violence in the world.

In peace,
Marit Johnson, author
Mary Streufert and Jamie Ulrich, editors

¹ “Gender-based Violence,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

A NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS AND LEADERS

People have inflicted gender-based violence on each other for thousands of years. There are stories about it in the Bible. Statistics are difficult to gauge exactly because of silence by perpetrators who try to hide it or by people unable to report it. For the purpose of this study, most statistics are based on the experiences of college and university students. However, if your group is interested in using statistics from a wider base, please feel free to insert those statistics as you see fit. An additional reading list and suggested materials are listed at the end of this study guide, which provides a helpful starting point to find additional statistics.

Gender-based violence is more pervasive in our society than some may think. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Social Message on "Gender-based Violence" connects biblical contexts, current examples, and suggestions on how we can move forward together in hope and accompaniment with victim-survivors.² This study guide aims to provide an opportunity to discuss how we as people of faith work for justice with our neighbor so that all are respected and valued.

God's blessings to you as you move forward with this study guide. May it provide you with thoughtful conversation that leads to prayerful action.

² "Gender-based Violence," (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.



SESSION 1:

What Is Gender-based Violence?

As we begin...

Every person brings their own experiences with them to any situation. For this study guide, you may bring many ideas of what gender-based violence is, what it means to you, and your experience(s) with it.

Take a moment to think of what you know about gender-based violence. Write down your thoughts and any experiences you bring with you. What do you carry with you? Why do you carry it? What may be hard for you to address? What may be points of resistance or conflict for you?

This paper is for you. You do not need to share this information with anyone. As we move forward through these study sessions, remember what you wrote here and how it shapes your experience.

As we learn together...³

The ELCA aims to be a church working for social justice — proclaiming “the ‘good news’ of the Gospel that we are freed from bondage to sin.”⁴ This “allows us to respond to the Triune God’s mercy through love for and service to the neighbor.”⁵ As Lutherans, we believe in a shared calling to love and serve our neighbor(s). We do this by standing by the belief that God justifies and “expects all people to do justice.”⁶

As a church actively striving for justice in society, we know that this work is not easy. One reason that gender-based violence is difficult to address is because it affects a wide range of people in many ways.

³ Throughout this study guide, we will reference other ELCA social statements and social messages. The interconnectedness of all of these documents as expressions of this church’s teaching and policy demonstrate how all of these issues shape each other. Sometimes the wording from the documents will be paraphrased, while other times the original wording fits best for our context in discussing gender-based violence.

⁴ *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), 36. <http://download.elca.org/elca%20resource%20repository/sexualityss.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), 3. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf.

While some may think of only domestic violence or sexual assault,

“gender-based violence is physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons.”⁷

Sometimes the violence is harder to see than other times. For example, two people witnessing the same conversation between a couple may view it differently. One person may see a couple just talking casually with each other. Another person may see the tension in their body language or may overhear controlling phrases.

Think about the definition of gender-based violence above. What are some ways that gender-based violence seems more explicit and times when it seems subtle? What are instances when gender-based violence seems normalized?

Explicit

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Subtle

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Normalized

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

⁷ “Gender-based Violence,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015).

Sometimes it is hard to see gender-based violence around us. It can become socialized as “normal” or “just how things are.” Many who inflict it try to keep it hidden. There are times victim-survivors hide the abuse to protect their abuser.⁸ Why do you think someone would think about protecting their abuser? Discuss with your group.

As we dig deeper...

Read “What Is Gender-based Violence?” on pages 6 and 7 of the “Gender-based Violence” social message. What surprises you from these pages? Discuss with a partner.

Putting the social message in context: What percentage of female college sexual violence victims reported the incident to law enforcement?⁹

a) 40% b) 30% c) 20% d) 10%

Of the same student age group (18-24 years old), 26 percent of female college students believed that sexual violence was a private matter, and 9 percent believed police would not or could not do anything to help.¹⁰

What is your reaction to these statistics? How do they make you feel? Discuss your reactions in groups.

Because some people are told that gender-based violence is “not important enough” or a “personal matter,” it is harder to gain data because they do not come forward.¹¹ It can also be hard to gain data when gender-based violence can consist of comments and whispers against people – their bodies, their clothes and their intellect.

⁸ “The Criminal Justice System: Statistics,” RAINN, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

⁹ “Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics,” RAINN, accessed October 17, 2016, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Most cases of gender-based violence are characterized as acts of violence against women and girls. In the following sessions, we will examine how a patriarchal society influences this. It is important to note how a patriarchal society also inflicts gender-based violence on LGBTQ individuals.¹² Attacks on LGBTQ individuals are twice as likely to happen than hate crimes targeting African-Americans.¹³

Between 20 percent to 25 percent of LGBTQ people will experience hate crimes in their lifetimes.¹⁴ Other studies show that 50 percent of transgender people will experience sexual violence at some point during their lives.¹⁵ Many times these attacks go unreported because LGBTQ people fear outing themselves to family, friends or employers.¹⁶

Rae'Lynn Thomas was a black transgender woman who was shot to death by her mother's ex-boyfriend in August of 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. According to Thomas' mother, the ex-boyfriend was transphobic.¹⁷

What similarities do you see between the difficulties of gathering data on gender-based violence in college-aged women and LGBTQ victims? Write down your thoughts.

12 This acronym refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer individuals. This umbrella term also often includes intersex, questioning, asexual, two-spirit, and other varied identities.

13 Haeyoun Park and Iaryna Mykhyalsyshyn. "LGBT People are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group," The New York Times, June 16, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/16/us/hate-crimes-against-lgbt.html?_r=0.

14 Rob Wile, "It's Still Dangerous to Be Gay in America. Here Are the Statistics that Prove It," Splinter, June 12, 2016, <https://splinternews.com/it-s-still-dangerous-to-be-gay-in-america-here-are-the-1793857468>.

15 Alia E. Dastagir, "2016 Was the Deadliest Year on Record for the LGBTQ Community," USA Today, June 12, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/06/12/2016-deadliest-year-lgbtq-pulse/373840001/>.

16 "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics." RAINN.

17 Alia E. Dastagir, "2016 Was the Deadliest Year on Record for the LGBTQ Community."

Gender-based violence occurs against people of all genders, but it occurs in higher rates against women.¹⁸ While some may think of gender-based violence and domestic violence as the same, gender-based violence is a more encompassing term.

As a church, we acknowledge that gender-based violence:

- Rejects the created goodness and dignity that God gives to every human creature.
- Violates the joy and freedom of the reconciled life accomplished through Jesus Christ and given by God for all humankind to enjoy, as individuals and in community.
- Attacks the gifts in each person that are given by the Holy Spirit for the common good.¹⁹

As we go out...

How can you acknowledge someone's gifts this week?

Closing Prayer

Compassionate God,
As we journey out into the world,

Help us to think about what we hear and what we say about
and to others.

Help us to recognize the violence that is hidden.

Keep our hearts open to those of us in need of love. Amen.

¹⁸ "Statistics About Sexual Violence." National Sexual Violence Resource Center, accessed October 17, 2016, www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf.

¹⁹ "Gender-based Violence," (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.



SESSION 2:

Who Is Involved?

As we begin...

Reflect on what we discussed last week. What stood out to you the most? What surprised you? What is useful or helpful for you to remember as you move into today's session? Discuss what you remember in groups of three.

As we learn together...

For some victim-survivors of gender-based violence, it is too difficult to talk about their experience. It brings back flashbacks and memories.²⁰ Others may feel like their case is “not important” enough to be brought up.²¹ A third reason is that some feel that by bringing their case forward, they put themselves in danger.²² There are other times when the victim does not want to bring their case forward because they do not want to get their abuser in trouble.²³

What percentage of people who are sexually assaulted are assaulted by someone they know?²⁴

- a) 10-20% b) 30-40% c) 50-60% d) 70-80%

²⁰ “Flashbacks,” RAINN, accessed June 15, 2017. <https://www.rainn.org/articles/flashbacks>.

²¹ “The Criminal Justice System: Statistics,” RAINN, accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Sexual Assault,” RAINN, accessed April 24, 2017. <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>.

Take a moment to read “Who Is Involved?” on page 2 in the “Gender-based Violence” social message. Then read the two excerpts listed here. Circle or underline what stands out to you. What from the social message sticks with you as you read the other two stories?

- Read II Samuel 13:1-22
- Read this excerpt from “Our Voices, Our Stories: Sexism in Church and Society.”²⁵

“I was at a church-related event for youth and young adults during my senior year in high school. Like many of these events, all the participants stayed in a hotel, and, like many of these events, there were very strict rules to be followed in regard to room arrangements and curfews.

I was simply hanging out in my room with a group of my trusted friends, watching a movie on television. I dozed off during the movie, as I often do. I woke up to an unwelcome, unsolicited sexual gesture and was sexually assaulted in my own hotel bed. He left my room afterward, and I have never felt so alone in my life...

[O]ne specific person that I did tell was someone who, I thought, would have and should have had power to “do” something, but nothing was done. I have not even shared this experience with my family because of their involvement in the church and their knowledge of and respect for the young man involved. Largely, I carry this alone.”

²⁵ Mary Streufert, ed., “Power, Silence and Sexism,” “Our Voices, Our Stories: Sexism in Church and Society,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2011), 23-25.

These cases were not committed because of passion. Gender-based violence is based on control and power; statistics show that 71 percent of rapes are planned in advance.²⁶ Gender-based violence occurs to people of all socioeconomic statuses, races and ethnicities.²⁷ One common thread in gender-based violence is feeling alone and abandoned.²⁸

1. What is your reaction to these two stories?
2. How can you support someone who is a victim-survivor of gender-based violence?
3. What resources and offices are available on your campus for people who have experienced gender-based violence?
 - Make a list of ideas including phone numbers, websites, and addresses when applicable.

Gender-based violence is not a single-sided issue. People experience gender-based violence differently depending on *intersectionality*. Intersectionality is a theory about the reality that people have interconnected social identities including race, gender, sexuality, ability and class.²⁹ These social identities are valued differently, which can heighten systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by individuals.³⁰ White gay men are affected differently than straight black women. Straight Latina women are affected differently than transgender white women. The various descriptors that we classify ourselves with intersect to help us describe who we are – both positively and negatively. We see the world from different intersectional viewpoints, and intersectional identities influence how people treat us day-to-day.

The following activity helps us to see how intersectionality in our lives can separate us from one another and make each individual's journey so different from another's.

26 "Myths and Facts about Sexual Assault," Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.raccfm.com/files/Sexual%20Assault.pdf>.

27 "Gender-based Violence," (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), 7. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

28 Emily Crockett, "Rape and sexual assault are common. So why don't we believe victims?" *Vox*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/1/11538748/believe-rape-victims>.

29 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989: 139–168.

30 Nicki Lisa Cole, "Definition of Intersectionality: On the Intersecting Nature of Privileges and Oppression," *ThoughtCo*, Updated December 11, 2016, <https://www.thoughtco.com/intersectionality-definition-3026353>.

As we dig deeper...

Before we begin the next activity, it is important to make a covenant of trust with one another. Remember that “No human relationships can thrive in the absence of trust.”³¹ Make a covenant with your neighbors to be honest and open with each other. What is said in this space is left in this space.

Class, ethnicity and race intersect with gender and sexual orientation. These intersections greatly affect a person’s position of privilege in society. During this exercise called “Can you walk in my shoes?”, be honest with yourself. What is your gut reaction to the question? Each statement will ask you to step forward or backward depending on your experience. If a statement is too uncomfortable for you to respond to, you do not have to move. People do not always feel safe revealing intimate details of their experiences.

1. If you identify as a cisgender male, take one step forward.
2. If you ever felt judged or uncomfortable because of the size, height, or shape of your body, take one step back.
3. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
4. If you are ever afraid of violence because of your race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.
5. If you have ever been discouraged from academics or jobs because of race, class, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.
6. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
7. If you feel good about how the culture you identify with is portrayed in the media, take one step forward.
8. If you are ever fearful walking alone, take one step back.
9. If you’ve ever felt your voice talked over or ignored during study sessions or meetings, take one step back.
10. If your home has always been a safe, comfortable environment for you, take one step forward.

³¹ *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), 13. <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf>.

Take a look around at where you and your neighbors are standing. Remember the covenant to be open, honest, and respectful of each other. If you would like, write your answer to these questions on sticky notes; pass these sticky notes to your group leader. They will then post them on the wall for everyone to read.

- How do you feel?
- What surprises you about where you stand?
- Is there a common ground?

As we go out...

The next session discusses more about the social systems that create these dynamics of our society. As you are living life this week, pay attention to where these disparities—like what creates the space between you and others during the activity—may occur.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, all people need to work together to create change.

Help us to reach out to others, to be a listening ear when they need someone to listen; when all that is needed is our presence together. We pray for strength, hope, love, and unity.

In God's love we pray. Amen.



SESSION 3:

Why Do People Inflict Gender-Based Violence?

As we begin...

Do you remember where you stood at the end of our last session? In Session 2, the “Can You Walk in My Shoes” activity looked at intersectionality and how it affects everyone differently. Another way to think about intersectionality is to think of which communities you belong to.³² People are members of multiple communities at the same time.

Which communities would you consider yourself a member of? How do you describe yourself? On your own, create a bubble chart or a Venn Diagram to show how your communities are connected. What intersections do you see? Discuss them with a partner.

As we learn together...

Intersectionality compounds how people experience gender-based violence. Some people try to explain gender-based violence away as lust or jealousy. Gender-based violence takes place in many forms, but there is one thing that puts its many forms in the same category— control. The social message notes, “Gender-based violence is a powerful tool of fear and control.”³³

Read “Why Do People Inflict Gender-based Violence,” on pages 8 and 9 in the social message. Where do you see connections with intersectionality? Discuss your thoughts in small groups.

³² AWID, “Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice,” *Women’s Rights and Economic Change*, no. 9 (2004): 2, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/intersectionality_a_tool_for_gender_and_economic_justice.pdf.

³³ “Gender-based Violence,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), 9. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

Read Psalm 10.

- Underline the sections that make you think of fear or control.
 - Which section stuck out the most for you? Why?
 - Share in small groups
- [Bracket] the sections that seem to be a person crying out in loneliness.
 - In what ways does this relate to the last session and people not reporting violence committed against them?
 - Share your ideas in small groups.
- Circle the sections that have hope.
 - Verse 17 says, “O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, **you will incline your ear.**”
 - What can you do to incline your ear to survivors of gender-based violence?

As we dig deeper...

Society has changed quite a bit since biblical times, but one way that our society is still linked with biblical times is in its male-centered or *patriarchal* nature. The root of patriarchy is grounded in controlling and oppressing one group so that the other group is more successful.³⁴ This is the exact opposite of creating the social trust relationships need.³⁵ We should strive for relationships and social structures built on trust so that they:

- Promote value, and respect the human dignity of each individual
- Protect all from physical, emotional, and spiritual harm
- Demonstrate mercy, compassion, and justice for all
- Promote the welfare of individuals and the common good of society³⁶

³⁴ Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 13.

³⁵ *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), 5. <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf>.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

One way to think about patriarchy in our context is to look at popular culture.

- Write down three of your favorite movies or TV shows.
- Next to each movie or show, write down the name of the main character.
- Of those characters, how many are female? How many are genderqueer or gender non-conforming?
- What do the female characters do? What do the male characters do? What contrasts between their roles in each plot?

Of the films that have won the Oscar for Best Picture from 1968 to 2013, only four films tell the story through the lens of someone who is female.³⁷

- How would you describe the females in your list? Brave? Courageous? Witty? Kind?
- Write down your descriptions next to the characters' names.

Our patriarchal society shapes how we view all people.

- How would you describe the male characters you listed? Brave? Daring? Reckless? Trustworthy? Secretive?
- Write down your descriptions next to the characters' names.
- Compare your descriptions. What differences do you see?

³⁷ Ibid, 11.

Of course, there can be other factors that can influence gender-based violence. These can include alcohol, drugs, post-traumatic stress disorder, or a history of family violence. These can further influence fear and desire for control.

Patriarchy is only one form of a social system that makes up part of our culture in the United States. Social systems “are interrelated social relations, habits, laws, ideas and beliefs in which everyone participates in varying ways.”³⁸

- In what other social systems do you participate? Name one.
- How does that social system intersect with patriarchy?

As we go out...

As members of the church, we are members of faith. Through this, we know that “Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in relationships and structures of society.”³⁹

As you go out today, notice the different social systems you participate in. How do they intersect with each other? What are parts of social systems you can influence? Where do you see a need for justice?

Sing: Evangelical Lutheran Worship #752 “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

Closing Prayer

Lord, listen to your children praying.

Send your spirit among us to recognize the sin of gender-based violence.

Guide us as we continue studying together.

Send us strength, send us love, send us grace. Amen.

38 “Gender-based Violence,” 9. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

39 *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, (Chicago: ELCA,1991), 2. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf.



SESSION 4:

How Does Christianity Sometimes Contribute to These Problems?

As we begin...

Session 3 asked us to examine control. Gender-based violence is grounded in control. When someone focuses on controlling others, they do not give people the freedom and love to grow into who God is calling them to be. How can you honor someone and encourage them to grow in love? How can you, “promote value and respect the human dignity” of others?⁴⁰ It doesn’t need to be a grand gesture. What is something small that respects another person’s dignity? How can you still give someone dignity and respect when you may not agree with them on a topic? Discuss these questions in pairs.

As we learn together...

Sharing respect and honoring dignity is difficult and essential when discussing beliefs – especially in a group where beliefs vary. Christian denominations have different interpretations of Scripture. Some Christians rely on the Bible and Christian history to create a hierarchy between males and females. This leads some denominations to deny women from being ordained. Other denominations tell women to be submissive to their husbands during their wedding service (and throughout their marriage). They do so through their interpretations of selected Scripture readings, including Adam and Eve in Genesis.

- Have you encountered sexism in the church? When? What happened?
- Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts.
- Read the story below; another woman’s story telling of her experience was in Session 2.

⁴⁰ *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2009), 14. <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf>.

Even in denominations that do ordain women, pastors who are women are exposed to overt sexism. Read this story from “Our Voices, Our Stories: Sexism in Church and Society.”

“At a congregation council meeting early in my call as an associate pastor, parishioners came to raise their concerns over being a Reconciling in Christ congregation and allowing PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians) to meet in the church building.

The members who came to the council meeting were upset, saying that we were promoting homosexuality. They were very angry and vocal and the council allowed them to say whatever they wanted.

I couldn’t remain silent anymore when one of them, a retired white man, expressed his “tolerance” by saying, “I will sit next to ‘one of them’ just like I’ll sit next to a nigger.”

I stood up and said, “You cannot use language like that in the church. You are welcome to your opinions, but your language is unacceptable. You’ll need to leave if you cannot keep your comments appropriate.”

He told me, “You need to sit down, little lady. I can say whatever I want.” No one in the room came to my defense.”⁴¹

- How does this example demonstrate patriarchy?
- How does it demonstrate the believed hierarchy of individuals?

⁴¹ Mary J. Streufert, ed., “Little Lady,” “Our Voices, Our Stories: Sexism in Church and Society,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2011), 6-7.

As we dig deeper...

There are many different ways to refer to God. What words, pronouns, and names have you heard others use to refer to God? What words do you use to refer to God?

Name three ways to refer to God.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Compare your three terms with others in your group. How did you refer to God? Male? Female? Gender-neutral? Non-human?

The Bible refers to God in a number of ways: masculine, feminine and gender-neutral. In Deuteronomy 32, God is referred to in all three ways. Read Deuteronomy 32:1-31. Look closely at verses 4, 18 and 31; circle the three related ways that God is referred to as male, female and gender-neutral.

What other times do you remember in which God is referred to as a woman or as feminine?⁴² Here are three: Matthew 23:37, Hosea 11:3-4, and Isaiah 46:3-4.

We are all made in God's image. Women and men are equal in God's sight as children of God. There is no hierarchy between people; there is no barrier of superiority. We can support and love each other with our unique gifts.

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28)

⁴² ELCA, “Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2016), 89. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/FAITH_SEXISM_JUSTICE_Conversations_toward_a_Social_Statement.pdf.

Take a moment to read “How Does Christianity Sometimes Contribute to These Problems” on pages 9 through 11 in the social message.

- How does this section make you feel?
- What more would you like to know?

In this fallen world, our patriarchal society leads to a hierarchy of people. This not only promotes gender-based violence, but can sway people’s reactions to gender-based violence. This can lead people to blame the victim for the violence that was done to them. It can lead people to tell the victim-survivor, “Everything happens for a reason,” or that this experience is “their cross to bear.”

- Have you heard church people say these things? Were they helpful? Hurtful?
- What would you have rather heard?
- What else have you heard church members or leaders tell you about gender-based violence?

God does not wish for violence to happen to any part of creation. God loves each individual. God is there to walk with each individual in their suffering. God is present. God provides hope.

This is not the survivor’s cross to bear. Jesus bore the cross. Through Christ, we can walk with our neighbor who is suffering. By being there, listening, and saying “I believe you,” we acknowledge the victim-survivor’s hurt and confusion and begin to be a church that helps survivors in their lowliest place rather than blame them.⁴³ We confess that our church has failed our neighbor when we do not walk with our neighbor and do not hold the perpetrator accountable.

Some churches have already begun confessing this sin; others are still working their way through how to acknowledge this. How can you be a part of helping your local church or denomination?

⁴³ Sara Olson-Smith, “I Believe You. It’s Not Your Fault. You Are Not Alone,” St. Paul Lutheran Church, Oct. 11, 2016, www.stpaulqc.org/blog/i-believe-you-its-not-your-fault-you-are-not-alone.

As we go out...

Sing Evangelical Lutheran Worship #704 – “When Pain of the World Surrounds Us”

- As you go out this week, take time to notice where you see hope.
- What forms does hope take for you?

Closing Prayer

Mothering God, let your calls for justice echo out of us. Help us to be open, not closed.

Guide us to listen. Let your healing and justice flow through us and through those who yearn to be filled with your presence.

Amen.

NOTES



SESSION 5:

Where Is God in the Midst of the Problems and Pain and Suffering?

As we begin...

The best way to create understanding and empathy between people is to listen to each other. As we begin, practice *active listening* with a partner. Active listening asks people to try to understand the person they are listening to before they make themselves understood, to be non-judgmental, to give their attention to the person speaking, and to use silence in ways to let the speaker have time to fully express what they want to say, without interruption.⁴⁴

- Each of you will have two-and-a-half minutes to talk about something you have been thinking about from Session 4.
 - What is something that stuck with you from Session 4?
- When you are the listener, examine your body language.
 - How are you an attentive listener by using nonverbal signals?

As we learn together...

When have you ever felt truly alone? For victims of gender-based violence, it can be a very solitary time. They may want to hide their experiences from others for fear of further repercussions against themselves, or they fear getting the perpetrator in trouble. Of sexual cases that do not get reported, 7 percent do not report because they did not want to get the perpetrator in trouble.⁴⁵

How many sexual assault cases go unreported each year?

- a) 1 out of 4 b) 1 out of 3 c) 2 out of 3 d) 3 out of 4

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Active Listening," U.S. Department of State, accessed June 19, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/m/a/os/65759.htm>.

⁴⁵ "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," RAINN, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

Take a moment to read “Where Is God in the Midst of the Problems and Pain and Suffering” on pages 11 and 12 in the social message. Then, sing Evangelical Lutheran Worship #703 – “O God, Why Are You Silent.” As you sing, think about what emotions this song stirs up in you.

- Which parts of “O God, Why Are You Silent?” resonate most with you?
 - Take a blank piece of paper and markers and write or draw what you felt.
 - How might this song relate to someone who is a victim of gender-based violence? Write your thoughts on the back of your drawing.

As we dig deeper...

While there are times when we may not feel God’s presence, God is always with us, for “God does not intend people to be hurt. God is with every victim.”⁴⁶ Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Once you’ve finished the reading, answer the following questions:

- If we are all the body of Christ, how can you support someone and be present for someone who doesn’t feel God’s presence?
- When do you feel God is with you?
- What are resources you can direct someone to?
- Sing Evangelical Lutheran Worship #790 verses 2 and 3 – “Day by Day.”
- How do these verses influence your initial drawing?

⁴⁶ “Gender-based Violence,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), 11. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

As we go out...

- How can you rely on your faith to “challenge what dehumanizes” and “to confront the structural obstacles to justice”?⁴⁷ It doesn’t have to be big. What is a small step you can take?
- As you go out this week, how can you share God’s healing, tenderness and care?
- Add these thoughts on the back of your drawing.

Closing Prayer

God of compassion, be with those of us who feel abandoned.

You hold us ever in your hand.

Guide our wounded hearts to seek out the help we long to find.

Amen.

NOTES

⁴⁷ *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, (Chicago: ELCA 1991), 5. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf.



SESSION 6:

What Should We Do?

As we begin...

When was a time when someone showed you true kindness? Was it unexpected? Was it from someone you know or a stranger? What was the situation? What was happening? Create a word cloud describing what happened and how you felt. Vary your colors and sizes of your words to best describe your story.

As we learn together...

Gender-based violence is a complicated and terrifying sin that is not the fault of the victim-survivor. So what should we do? How can we help in something that touches so many areas of this broken world?

As Lutherans, we work within a “faith that is active in love, a love that seeks justice, and an insight that strives to discern what is right, good, and fitting.”⁴⁸ St. Paul writes, “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15b). The most important thing you can do is to simply sit with the victim-survivor and listen. While you are with the victim-survivor, let them know, “I believe you. It’s not your fault. You are not alone.”⁴⁹

- How can you practice active listening with someone who needs you to listen?
- Read “What Should We Do?” on pages 12 through 16 in the Gender-based Violence Social Message. Then, move into the discussion with *As we dig deeper*.

⁴⁸ *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), 8. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf.

⁴⁹ Sara Olson-Smith, “I Believe You. It’s Not Your Fault. You Are Not Alone,” St. Paul Lutheran Church, Oct. 11, 2016, www.stpaulqc.org/blog/i-believe-you-its-not-your-fault-you-are-not-alone.

As we dig deeper...

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:12; 26).

Not only are we called to accompany our neighbors who have experienced gender-based violence, we are called to spark change in our communities and in our church.

Four ways to begin this journey toward change are:

1. Recognize, name and root out the violence and its sources wherever it is happening.
2. Ensure care and create safe communities that foster healing.
3. Provide education.
4. Create accountability.⁵⁰

How can you become involved? For each of these steps, write down one idea you have to make a difference. Discuss your ideas in small groups. Then, compare your ideas to the suggestions listed on pages 18 through 22 of the “Gender-based Violence Foundational Documentation.”⁵¹

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

“The God who justifies expects all people and social institutions to do justice and foster practices that serve the common good.”⁵²

50 “Gender-based Violence,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), 13. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

51 “Gender-based Violence Foundational Documentation,” (Chicago: ELCA, 2015), 18-22. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM_Documentation.pdf.

52 “Gender-based Violence,” 15. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gender_Based_Violence_SM.pdf.

What changes do you hope to see in our church and society regarding gender-based violence? As a group, create a poster. How can we achieve this change together?

As we go out...

Write a few prayers on your poster. As a group, sing Evangelical Lutheran Worship #752, “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying,” between each petition.

As you go out today, think of how you can implement and share what you learned in this series. Because God has set you free in Christ, you are a force for change and justice.

Closing Prayer

Lord, listen to your children praying. Send your spirit to guide us in this work for justice.

Guide our minds to be aware of the injustice in our world,

Guide our hearts to work with compassion,

Use our voices to speak with our neighbor. Amen.

Go in Peace. Now the service begins.

Thanks be to God.

NOTES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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