



# Report of the Church in Society Unit

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## Statement of Purpose

The Church in Society (CS) unit assists this church "to discern, understand, and respond to the needs of human beings, communities, society, and the whole creation through direct human services and through addressing systems, structures, and policies of society, seeking to promote justice, peace, and the care of the earth." The constitutional description of this unit appears in continuing resolution 16.12.D06, printed in Section X of this volume. The report on the work of Justice for Women will be provided in Section V of this 2007 *Pre-Assembly Report*.

## Report of Work for 2005-2007

### ***Moral deliberation as central to baptismal vocation***

Moral deliberation is the pursuit of understanding through respectful dialogue among Christians on issues about which they disagree. Such dialogue demonstrates the importance of a Christian community that embraces not only people who differ by race, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation, but also those who differ in their moral perspectives. It witnesses to the belief that the unity of the baptized is in Christ and not in human traditions.

The Church in Society unit promotes moral deliberation through the development of social policy in the forms of social statements, social policy resolutions, and messages, as well as study documents, teaching materials, conferences, and listening posts.

One example of the use of a study document to foster moral deliberation is "Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality (Journey Together Faithfully, Part III)." More than 12,000 copies were distributed and an untold number were printed from the Web site. The process will lead to the drafting of a social statement on human sexuality to be considered at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

In 2006 the work of the task force on education resulted in the publication and distribution of the first draft of a social statement, "Our Calling in Education: A Lutheran Study." Fifty hearings in 40 synods were held on the first draft. In January 2007, the task force completed its work on a proposed social statement to be considered at the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

Now in its sixth year, the monthly online *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* ([www.elca.org/jle](http://www.elca.org/jle)) offers articles by Lutheran ethicists on a wide range of issues. The database presently includes 600 articles by 400 authors. The online journal averages 20,000 page views per month.

This unit continues to provide leadership in the area of faith, science, and technology. In October 2006, the Work Group on Faith and Science coordinated a Sunday Scientist Symposium at which 30 participants explored how scientists integrate faith, vocation, and congregational life.

### ***Leadership development for prophetic diakonia***

According to "An Epistle from the Lutheran World Federation Global Consultation on Diakonia" (LWF 2002), diakonia is central to what it means to be the Church and an essential part of discipleship. It states, "While diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms, and transforms" because it necessarily takes on a prophetic character. According to this LWF text, the heart of prophetic diakonia is moving beyond politeness and pretense, breaking the silence, and taking the risk of speaking truth to power, even when this threatens the established order and results in hardship or persecution.

During this biennium, the Church in Society unit has sought to contribute understanding and experience of prophetic diakonia to the leadership development of this church. The unit convenes the Alliance on Poverty and Wealth, which is engaged in a planning process to assist the ELCA in its ministry among people living in poverty. The unit convened a Work Group on AIDS, which supported the Ecumenical Pre-Conference and the International AIDS Conference in Canada. The working group continues to work with the Lutheran AIDS Network and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

The Poverty Ministries Networking program sponsored events that brought together people living in poverty and people working in communities affected by poverty, for example, the Diakonia Institute—a training process that supports leadership and skill development of low-income lay leaders in urban and rural ELCA congregations.

Meetings with members of the American Indian and Alaska Native communities were convened to explore sustainable economic development programs that can be implemented within these communities. Training and technical assistance are provided to organizations in Appalachia, in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition on Ministry in Appalachia.

The vision to deepen the capacities for our church in its various expressions to be more powerfully present in public life on behalf of all that God is creating continues to undergird the work of congregation-based community organizing.

### ***Eradicating chronic hunger and pervasive poverty***

The ELCA World Hunger Program, an interunit collaboration directed by this unit, received \$16.2 million through the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal in 2004 and just over \$17 million in 2005. Additional funds for “Stand with Africa” were received in the amounts of \$900,000 in 2004 and \$450,000 in 2005. World Hunger funds are allocated in the four areas of relief, development, education, and advocacy. The Church in Society unit awarded grants for domestic relief, development, and community organizing to 236 organizations in 2004 and 275 organizations in 2005. These grants ranged in size from \$500 to \$10,000 and averaged \$3,000. Additional grants supported the work of such programs as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Bread for the World, and the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia. Below-market loans assisted community development projects.

In addition to grants, activities in hunger education and advocacy reflect the commitment of this church to eradicate the scandal of poverty as expressed in the 2005 Churchwide Assembly hunger resolution and in the objectives of the hunger program. The World Hunger Program is developing new interactive curricula, strengthening the synod hunger leader network, launching a young adults initiative, and deepening its relationship with seminaries.

### ***Advocating for justice, peace, and care of creation***

The advocacy ministry of this church, administered through this unit, occurs at the state level through 20 state public policy advocacy offices, at the federal level through the ELCA Washington Office, globally through the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations—a ministry shared with the LWF, and in relation to the private sector through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program.

The ELCA Washington Office provides engagement around issues affecting Africa (Darfur, Sudan, and Uganda), trade and international development, the Millennium Development Goals, and the ONE/ONE Lutheran Campaigns with a particular emphasis on HIV-AIDS. Middle East work is now prioritized and focused through the ELCA churchwide strategy—“Peace Not Walls,” its advocacy work with Churches for Middle East Peace, and through Presiding Bishop Hanson’s involvement with the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East—an interfaith organization of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders committed to finding peace.

The ELCA Washington Office initiated a major effort around the Farm Bill of 2007 which will involve trade and farm subsidy issues, food stamps, conservation programs, and rural development. It created a task force on trade to assess the

ELCA’s position and conducted a series of listening posts across the country to hear the views of Lutherans.

The ELCA Washington Office also created a task force on legislation and advocacy related to Hurricane Katrina, and continues its focus on the preservation and funding of human service programs in the annual federal budget in areas related to affordable housing, healthcare, child welfare, nutrition and hunger, welfare and wages, job-training and education, and domestic violence. The office has been a partner with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service at the federal level around comprehensive immigration reform. It is working with other churchwide partners on issues of importance to American Indian and Alaska Native peoples.

This unit initiated a strategic review of ELCA state public policy offices in an effort to support the work of the offices. At the state level these offices represent the policies of the ELCA on issues such as immigration. The Conference of Bishops and the directors of state public policy offices met together to understand and deepen the work of this church at the state level.

In an effort to expand the ELCA’s participation as “public church,” the Washington Office has developed issue-focused working groups of bishops so as to represent the ELCA’s social statements in the legislative process. It has created and trained student-led ELCA student advocacy teams at 15 ELCA colleges and universities, and it continues to strengthen its e-Advocacy network. To obtain more information online, please see [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy).

The Lutheran Office for World Community monitors a range of issues at the United Nations, based on ELCA and LWF social policy, working actively with the community of non-governmental organizations in New York. Among the issues given particular focus are: Israel-Palestine, the status of women, humanitarian affairs, the Millennium Development Goals, HIV-AIDS, and U.N. reform.

This office annually assists in organizing the Ecumenical Women coalition for the U.N. at the session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In addition, it has increased human rights monitoring and outreach to member churches, in conjunction with the LWF, on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program updated the social criteria screen process and strengthened collaboration with many of its partners, both ecumenically and within Lutheran circles. Since the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the CSR program has been involved in dialogues with over fifty companies ranging from international human rights to toxics in the environment. The ELCA has taken a leadership role in shareholder resolutions concerning policies to avoid predatory lending, promote energy efficiency, and remind corporations of their responsibility to address the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

In 2006 AIDS work was highlighted by the Lutheran Office for World Community chairing the advocacy committee established by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance for the U.N. Special Session Review on HIV-AIDS. CSR then chaired the advocacy committee established by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance for preparations for the International AIDS Conference in August 2006. The Lutheran Office for World Community also administered and coordinated the sponsorship of 12 young adults from the ELCA to this conference.

### ***Leverage relationships for service and advocacy***

Given the scale of human and environmental needs and the limitations of this church to address these needs, it increasingly is important to collaborate with other Lutheran, ecumenical, interfaith, governmental, and civil society organizations.

The ELCA is a sponsoring partner of Lutheran Services in America (LSA), together with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the 300 affiliated or recognized Lutheran social ministry organizations, together serving six million people each year in the U.S. and the Caribbean. Approximately 100 of these organizations are inter-Lutheran, and 170 are affiliated only with the ELCA. This unit grants annual funds that support Lutheran Services in America's core budget and the ministry of its peer crisis intervention and peer assessment services.

The Church in Society unit manages the affiliation process for ELCA social ministry organizations. During the past two years, eight new organizations were affiliated in partnership with the synods and congregations on whose territory they serve.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), a collaborative ministry with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, provides long-term help for those affected by natural and human-caused disasters. LDR functions through an affiliate network of 40 Lutheran social ministry organizations, providing spiritual and emotional care, hardship grants, volunteer coordination, and long-term recovery, rebuilding, and case management. LDR works closely with governmental agencies, secular response agencies such as the American Red Cross, and a host of faith-based disaster response agencies in partnership with Church World Service.

Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to the long-term recovery from the 2004-2005 hurricane season, which witnessed some of the most devastating storms ever recorded. Lutherans responded to these disasters through generous financial support and by volunteering their time. LDR coordinated over 20,000 volunteers, amounting to approximately 700,000 hours or about \$12.3 million of in-kind service to 15,000 households. The work of rebuilding the Gulf coast continues as LDR also responds to less-publicized disasters such as floods, tornadoes, and wildfires.

Preparedness for future disasters, in particularly disaster-prone areas and elsewhere, is a priority for LDR. A network of coordinators draw lessons from previous responses to prepare Lutheran congregations to serve their communities in the event of a disaster.

The ELCA, together with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, lives out this church's ministry to serve the neighbor by welcoming the stranger through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). In close partnership with synods, congregations, and volunteers, this ministry responds to the needs of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers here in the United States and through partnerships around the world.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service works closely with the ELCA Washington Office and the Conference of Bishops to advocate for justice by speaking out for fair public policies and championing the cause of vulnerable people, and offers technical assistance to partners, including social ministry organizations, to provide the innumerable legal, practical, health, and social responses needed in serving diverse refugee and immigrant populations. Through LIRS, Lutherans are widely recognized in the U.S. for taking a lead in welcoming the stranger.

### ***Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions***

***World Hunger:*** Over the past two years, this unit has worked to strengthen synod hunger leadership by giving increased staff attention to training, networking, and supporting synod leaders. It participated in planning and leading the second National Interfaith Hunger Event in Washington, D.C., in June 2007 which focused on hunger advocacy and the Farm Bill. A variety of hunger education materials have been produced for congregational use. The ELCA Washington Office led ELCA involvement in the ONE Campaign and ONE Lutheran Campaign, held listening posts in five states related to the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, especially its Food Stamps program, provided liaison with Bread for the World, and advocated for nutrition and hunger, affordable housing, child welfare, healthcare, job training, and domestic violence in keeping with ELCA social policy.

***Bioethical Research:*** In January 2007, the unit convened 20 scientists, ethicists, politicians, activists, farmers, and others to discern an initial agenda for the work of a task force charged with developing a social statement on genetics and biotechnology for this church. The selection of task force members and listening posts are next steps in the social statement development process.

***HIV and AIDS Education:*** The unit assembled a sizeable group of participants to the International AIDS Conference in August 2006, led by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson. There is a growing coordination of work on HIV and AIDS involving the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Lutheran AIDS Network, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran World Relief, companion synods, and the Church in Society unit. Advocacy has focused on the creation of federal programs and increases in funds for global HIV-AIDS. A proposal to develop an ELCA AIDS strategy will be considered at this assembly.

***Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Immigrants:*** This church responds to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants through its partner organization Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. During the past biennium, LIRS, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, and ELCA synodical bishops advocated for comprehensive and just immigration reform. This unit worked closely with LIRS to support establishing a network of synod task force members concerned with immigration and refugee concerns.

### **Major Directions for 2007-2009**

Future directions for the Church in Society unit will focus on carrying out the strategic directions of the ELCA with a particular emphasis on assisting this church to "Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created." To this end, it will begin work on a genetics social statement, and conclude work on the social statement on human sexuality. Continued attention will be given to increasing the participation of ELCA members in e-Advocacy, to strengthening the church's understanding of and response to hunger and poverty, to integrating the ethnic ministries strategies to the work of the Church in Society unit, and to justice for women.

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