

St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

**The Social Statements of the ELCA**  
**Session One – Introduction & “The Church in Society”**

*Opening Prayer*

*Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* – Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16, 29-32

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love” – Moravian Church motto

*Class Outline*

Session One (Jan 8 & 9) – Introduction

- 1) Gracious Conversations
- 2) Christ & the Moral Vision of Scripture
- 3) The Essentials of the Faith
- 4) “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” – the first ELCA Social Statement

Session Two (Jan 15 & 16) – *Social Statement on Caring for Creation*

Sessions Three (Jan 22 & 23) – *Social Statement on Peace*

Session Four (Jan 29 & 30) – *Social Statement on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture & Social Message on Immigration*

Session Five (Feb 5 & 6) – *Social Statement on Economic Life*

Session Six (Feb 12 & 13) – *Social Statement on Abortion*

Session Seven (Feb 19 & 20) – *Social Statement on Genetics & Health and Health Care*

*Gracious Conversations*

*Christ & the Moral Vision of Scripture*

*The Word within the Word – what is the Bible?*

“A cradle that holds the infant Jesus. Baby blankets that clothe the newborn Christ. Lutherans often use these well-known metaphors from Martin Luther to describe the Christian Scriptures and their importance. These simple metaphors clearly and profoundly describe both what the Scriptures are and what is their purpose. Simply stated, the Scriptures tell about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to present Jesus to all who listen to or read them. That is why Lutheran Christians say that the Scriptures are the ‘source and norm’ of their teaching and practice. As the Gospel writer John wrote, ‘these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31).”

(<https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/ELCA-Teaching/Scripture-Creeds-Confessions>)

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

*Scripture communicates the Gospel of Jesus Christ – it tells the story of God's redemptive love throughout human history – it expresses the words of eternal and abundant life*

Scripture communicates

- ~ God is a loving relationship of Three Persons – Father, Son, Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14)
- ~ God created the world and everyone in it (Gen 1)
- ~ God loves the world and everyone in it (1 John 4:10)
- ~ Jesus Christ came to save the world (John 3:16)
- ~ Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, lived, died on the cross, rose again to life, ascended into heaven, and will come again (Luke 24:46-47)
- ~ Jesus is the source of life now and forever, life abundant and eternal (John 11:25-26)
- ~ The Spirit is at work in this broken world and will one day restore creation (Rev 21:3-4)
- ~ We are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9)

*Scripture is the living word speaking into our lives and transforming us – it tells us who God is and who we are – it shows us how to live*

*Interpreting Scripture – how do we faithfully and fruitfully understand and enact the Bible?*

A few principles (from a Lutheran Christian perspective)

- ~ Scripture is interpreted in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- ~ Scripture is interpreted *contextually* – seeking to understand the passage in its *literary* (what does it say?), *historical* (what did it say to those who first experienced it?), and *present* (what does it say to us?) context
- ~ Scripture is interpreted through *communal discernment for present application* – how do we understand biblical teaching on matters not explicitly addressed in Scripture? how does biblical teaching apply today?
- ~ Scripture is interpreted through *analogy* – how are situations today comparable to those in the biblical world?
- ~ Scripture is interpreted “in light of Scripture” – understanding individual passages of the Bible in terms of the whole biblical narrative
- ~ All Scripture is God's Word, but some biblical points are more significant than others – Jesus spoke of the “Greatest” Commandments of Love (Matt 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28)
- ~ Scripture contains *law and gospel* – the law maintains social order and convicts us of our sin – the gospel saves us

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

### *The Essentials of the Faith*

#### Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9)

Scripture affirms that Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God to us (*Col 1:15-19*), the Savior of the world (*Luke 2:10-11*), the Lord of all creation (*Phil 2:3-11*) – and is the embodiment of what is right and good and true (*John 14:6-7*), the authority, guide, and example for how we are to live in relationship with God and each other and the whole creation (*Hebrews 12:1-2*), the standard for Christian morality (*1 John 2:3-6*)

Christ calls us to follow him (*Luke 9:23*), learn from him (*Matt 11:29*), love others as he loves us (*John 15:12*) – he sends his followers into the world to share his good news (*Acts 1:8*) – in love (*John 3:16*), peace (*John 20:21*), joy (*John 15:11*)

Jesus said to the disciples, “*So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*” (*John 13:14-15*)

#### God is love (1 John 4:8)

Jesus said to his disciples, “*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (*John 13:34-35*)

John wrote, “*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.*” (*1 John 4:7-11*)

Paul wrote, “*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*” (*1 Cor 13:4-8a*)

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

### *Love (agape)*

- ~ “the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, *esteem, affection, regard, love*” (BDAG, Greek Dictionary)
- ~ “something of the understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all...It is a love that seeks nothing in return. It is an overflowing love; it's what theologians would call the love of God working in the lives” of humans. (Martin Luther King, Jr., Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Nov 1957)
- ~ “Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.” (Martin Luther, The Heidelberg Disputation, note 28)

Paul wrote to the church in Galatia (Gal 5:6): *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.”*

Holy Spirit gives life (Romans 8:11)

Jesus said to his disciples, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”* (John 16:12-13)

Peter said (referring to his experience with Cornelius and his household), *“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”* (Acts 11:15-17)

Paul wrote, *“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”* (Galatians 5:22-25)

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

### **“The Church in Society”**

The ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) formed in 1988 with the joining of three Lutheran church bodies (American Lutheran Church, Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and Lutheran Church in America).

In 1991, the first ELCA Social Statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” was adopted by the Churchwide Assembly.

#### ***The Gospel and the Church (page 1)***

Lutherans define the church as the “congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered” (Article VII, Augsburg Confession).

#### ***The Church Universal (page 2)***

#### ***The Church ‘In’ But Not ‘From’ the World (page 2)***

~ not ‘from’ – John 17:14-17, John 18:36, Matthew 16:26, Romans 12:2, Acts 5:29, “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’”

~ ‘in’ – Genesis 12:3, Jeremiah 29:7, “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare,” Matthew 28:19-20 John 3:16, Acts 1:8

~ Luther, *‘The Two Kingdoms’* (Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed, 1523) – Christians live in the *kingdom of God*, governed by the gospel, and the *kingdom of this world*, governed by the law – God reigns over and thru both the church and the state, the church declares new life in Christ, the state preserves life on earth

~ “The Gospel does not allow the Church to accommodate to the ways of the world”

#### ***The Church’s Responsibility in Society (page 3)***

“This church respects the God-given integrity and tasks of governing authorities and other worldly structures, while holding them accountable to God.”

#### ***The Baptismal Vocation of Christians (page 4)***

~ Luther, “God does not need our good works nor our wealth, but our neighbor does.”

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

~ What Would Jesus Do? – the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

### ***A Community of Moral Deliberation (page 5)***

The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral – Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience

### ***Commitments (pages 6 - 8)***

~ Sustaining Vocation (page 6)

~ Witnessing as an Institution (page 7)

~ Deliberating on Social Questions (page 7)

“**ELCA social statements** are teaching and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God's work in the world. Social statements also set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church. They result from an extensive process of participation and deliberation and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.” (<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>)

*To date, there are 13 Social Statements:*

Church in Society (1991)

Abortion (1991)

The Death Penalty (1991)

Caring for Creation (1993)

Race, Ethnicity and Culture (1993)

Peace (1995)

Economic Life (1999)

Health and Health Care (2003)

Education (2007)

Human Sexuality (2009)

Genetics (2011)

The Church and Criminal Justice (2013)

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action (*approved 2019, final draft being prepared,*

<https://elca.org/womenandjustice>)

## St. John's Lutheran Church Winter 2020 Bible Study

“**Social messages of the ELCA** are topical documents adopted by the ELCA Church Council to focus attention and action on timely, pressing matters of social concern to the church and society. They are used to address pressing contemporary concerns in light of the prophetic and compassionate traditions of Scripture and do not establish new teaching or policy. Rather, they build upon previously adopted teaching and policy positions, especially from social statements.”  
(<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages>)

*To date, there are 14 Social Messages:*

AIDS (1988)

Israeli/Palestinian Conflict (1989)

Homelessness (1990)

End of Life Decisions (1992)

Community Violence (1994)

Sexuality: Common Convictions (1996)

Immigration (1998)

Suicide Prevention (1999)

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2001)

Terrorism (2004)

People Living with Disabilities (2010)

Mental Illness (2012)

Gender-based Violence (2015)

Human Rights (2017)

***God's Faithful Love (page 8)***