
Case Studies on ELCA Social Statements: *For Personal Reflection and Group Discussion*

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For many years this course has included study of selected social statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). I have been surprised and dismayed at how little familiarity students have with the social statements based on their involvement in the congregations of the church. The ELCA social statements are best understood not in analogy to church law but as study documents, useful as curricula for teaching and learning about ethical responsibility in the contemporary world. Congregational vitality would be enhanced by strengthening the interface of church and society through greater engagement with the social statements.

In order to enhance the usefulness of the ELCA social statements as study documents and focus attention on the interface between science and theological ethics, students were organized into work groups and asked to prepare a case study based on one of the social statements. The purpose is that these case studies be used to contextualize and deepen discussion of ethical issues related to the social statements. This article presents case studies based on five of the social statements: “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action” (2019), “Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries” (2013), “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” (2011), “For Peace in God’s World” (1995), and “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice” (1993).

The structure of each case study is similar, although the content differs. Each case study has been given a title, reflecting something of its content, followed by the name of the social statement and a link to finding it on the ELCA webpage. The first major section is “Background,” which provides scientific and other information pertinent to informed discussion of the case. The second major section is the “Case Study” itself, followed by “Discussion Ques-

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tions.” The cases would best be employed by groups with access to or prior reading of the given social statement, although they can also be used profitably as stand-alone curriculum. The names of the authors of the particular case study are listed at the end of each case.

The Case Study, *In the Image of God: Facing Differences*, based on “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action” (2019) explores the dynamics of sexism in congregational life from two distinct angles. First, the pastor in the case is a first-call woman pastor from Puerto Rico serving in a rural midwestern context. Second, it addresses the dilemma of transgender persons in relation to the ministry of the church.

The Case Study, *Freed for Life: Living with the Mark of Incarceration*, based on “Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries” (2013) involves the dilemma faced by a pastor and congregation discerning an employment decision about whom to hire for a position as church custodian, either a church member or a neighbor from the local community, who has recently been released from prison.

The Case Study, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Pharmacoge-*

nomics and the Opioid Crisis, based on “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” (2011) deals with the dilemma of a family contending with the challenges of opioid addiction and the implications of genetic testing to obtain information about a predisposition to such addiction. Moreover, the case poses the question about the relationship between genetic predisposition and original sin.

The Case Study, *Peace in the Midst of Conflict*, based on “For Peace in God’s World” (1995) engages one of the most tragic realities of our contemporary world, the threat of gun violence and how congregations deliberate taking precautions and measures to protect their members. The wide range of viewpoints held by congregation members provides leadership challenges for church leaders, deacons, and pastors. This case is noted with a “Trigger Warning” based on gun violence and the discussion of mass shootings.

The Case Study, *Claiming Creation as Our Neighbor*, based on “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice” (1993) examines competing ethical values related to a congregation’s long-term partner relationship between congregations in the U.S. and Tanzania. Young people in the congregation question whether the practice of traveling by plane to visit the companion congregation in Africa is not contributing to climate change in ways that need to be redressed.

We suggest those using these case studies engage their discussions based on the best information they have from the background explanation, the case study itself, and the respective social statement. It may be less useful to allow the discussion to become stalled by wondering about details not defined by the case.

We encourage you to make constructive use of these cases based on ELCA social statements to introduce study groups to the social statements themselves and to engage in a process of moral deliberation on the concrete ethical issues presented. I am grateful to the authors for their creative work in producing these cases and for giving permission for their publication.

In the Image of God: Facing Differences

Social Statement: “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action” (2019)

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf

Background

So God created humankind in [God’s] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them.¹

Women and girls have long suffered harm at the hands of power, privilege, and prejudice as inheritors of a patriarchal system that has been passed on and perpetuated from one generation to the next. “Patriarchy, a social system in which men hold power and women are largely excluded from power, creates the context for gender stereotyping, generalizing, exclusion, and abuse in faith spaces that manifest in everyday interactions....”² The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) addresses this concern in the social statement “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action.” This statement addresses how a patriarchal social system impacts the ability for girls and women to live life abundantly. Gender bias against women can be observed in a variety of ways, such as gender-based violence, limited opportunities for employment, pay disparity, and availability of appropriate healthcare.

Historically, science has been weaponized to promote gender bias. Scholarship has begun shedding light on this, while challenging some of the scientific interpretations that have been used to promote the inferior treatment of women.³ Studies demonstrate that the work of women in many fields, including science, is often valued less than that of their male counterparts. This has been found to be particularly true in relation to women of color.⁴

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Furthermore, 50% of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) vocations are more likely to say they have experienced discrimination in the workplace than 41% of women serving in non-STEM positions, while only 19% of men in the same STEM positions experience gender discrimination.⁵ Additionally, “about one in five employed women in the United States (22%) say they have been sexually harassed at work compared with 7% of employed men.”⁶

The church has also been a place where gender bias has been experienced. There is a 14% pay gap between men and women who are pastors in the ELCA.⁷ The role of women throughout the Christian church has largely been devalued and erased. Language of God has historically been limited to masculine pronouns; movements to develop inclusive and expansive language have been met with resistance.⁸ “While many religious denominations in the United States now allow women to pastor churches and synagogues, only 11% of American congregations were led by women in 2012...a figure that [has not] changed since 1998.”⁹

9, 2018). <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/01/09/women-and-men-in-stem-often-at-odds-over-workplace-equity/>

6. John Gramlich, “10 Things We Learned About Gender Issues in the U.S. in 2017,” *Pew Research Center*, (December 28, 2017). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/12/28/10-things-we-learned-about-gender-issues-in-the-u-s-in-2017/>

7. “User’s Guide for Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action,” 10. https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_User_Guide.pdf

8. *Ibid.*

9. David Masei, “The Divide Over Ordaining Women,” *Pew*

1. Genesis 1:27 (NRSV).

2. Linda Kay Klein, Paula Stone Williams, Isaac Archuleta, Carla Ewert, Marcus Halley, George Mekhail, Brandi Miller, and Tina Schermer Sellers, *Dialogues On: Sexuality Learner Book* (Sparkhouse Press, 2019), 12.

3. Sheri Berenbaum, “A Spirited Polemic Takes Aim at Biological Sex Differences but Misses Opportunities to Highlight Relevant Science,” *Science*, (January 18, 2017). <https://blogs.sciencemag.org/books/2017/01/18/723/>

4. Carol W. Greider, Jason M. Sheltzer et al., “Increasing Gender Diversity in the STEM Research Workforce,” *Science*, Vol. 366 (November 8, 2019): 694. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6466/692>

5. Cory Funk and Kim Parker, “Women and Men in STEM Often at Odds Over Workplace Equality,” *Pew Research Center*, (January

Research shows that “new technologies have generated a growing pile of evidence that there are inherent differences in how men’s and women’s brains are wired and how they work.”¹⁰ Studies have shown these differences not to be indicative of the superiority of one sex over the other but are centered in our sexuality. The hormones we receive *in utero* shape our brains and the way they work. “In general, brain regions that differ in size between men and women (such as the amygdala and the hippocampus) tend to contain especially high concentrations of receptors for sex hormones.”¹¹ Furthermore, “several studies confirmed previous findings, showing once more that transgender people appear to be born with brains more similar to the gender with which they identify, rather than the one to which they were assigned,”¹² thus making the case that a person’s gender identity is not a choice or mental disorder.

Case Study

Pastor Daniela Ruiz is the newly called pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, a Norwegian congregation located in central North Dakota, near the small farming community of Hagen, whose population was roughly 900 people at the last U.S. census. Faith Lutheran is a 123-year-old congregation. Pastor Daniela is the first female to have been called to serve as its minister of Word and Sacrament. Born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to parents Mariana and Hector Ruiz, Pastor Daniela regularly attended confession, religious education, and mass in a local Roman Catholic Church, where her family, on her mother’s side, had worshiped for multiple generations.

Like many congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Faith Lutheran has been experiencing a decline both in membership and financial resources over the last several years. As a result, the congregation council made the decision to call a first-call female candidate, because they could offer a single woman with no dependents a smaller compensation package than the previous male pastors, who had similar ministry experience and families.

During her years at a U.S. university, it was a great disappointment to her mother when Daniela experienced a call to become a minister of Word and Sacrament when attending an ecumenical Christian retreat in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. As women cannot serve in this capacity in the Roman Catholic Church, Daniela wrestled with her calling and wondered if a woman could truly consider following such a path, especially when her mother and

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several other female relatives, also Roman Catholics, repeatedly quoted Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 2:9–15 as one means of dissuasion, among many others.

Following a period of discernment, Daniela reevaluated her experience at the retreat, during which she had met and spoken with two female clergy, one of whom was serving an ELCA congregation. She then informed her family that following the completion of her undergraduate degree she would be undertaking graduate studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to begin her formalized training in ministry. Daniela considers her time in seminary to have been a challenging yet affirming experience. She truly believes God has called and equipped her to serve the church as an ordained pastor. She graduated with academic honors and eagerly accepted a call to a Small Town and Rural (STaR) context, claiming it as a new adventure and an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world.

Nine months into her ministry at Faith Lutheran, Daniela received an urgent, late-night phone call from the hospital in the next town over from Hagen. A hospital staff member spoke to Daniela, conveying that a patient named Jessi Thykeson had personally requested that Pastor Ruiz come for an immediate visit. Daniela did not know Jessi but agreed to make the pastoral care call.

Jessi Thykeson, 33 years of age, has been employed at the Hagan grain elevator in the scale house for the past nine and a half years. Having grown up on a farm and majored in Agricultural Systems Management at North Dakota State University (NDSU), Jessi was a natural in the position. Fellow employee, Trygve “Trig” Jensen, twenty-five years Jessi’s senior, took Jessi under his wing at the granary. The two men quickly became the best of friends both in and out of the workplace, often getting together for a round of golf or an afternoon of NDSU football. Trig has invited Jessi to attend worship at Faith Lutheran, but Jessi has continually declined, having felt ostracized as a young person in the church.

In addition to his job at the grain elevator, Trig also serves as the congregation council president at Faith Lutheran and has

Research Center, (September 09, 2014). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/09/the-divide-over-ordaining-women/>

10. Bruce Goldman, “Two Minds: The Cognitive Difference Between Men and Women,” *Stanford Med*, (2017). <https://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2017/06/05/inside-the-heads-of-men-and-women-a-look-at-sex-based-cognitive-differences/>

11. Ibid.

12. Katherine J. Wu, “Between the (Gender) Lines and the Science of Transgender Identity,” *Science in the News* (October 25, 2016). <http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2016/gender-lines-science-transgender-identity/>

long maintained the position that women do well serving as wives, homemakers, mothers, and Sunday school teachers but have no place being in the pulpit or other positions traditionally held by men. The relationship between Trig and Pastor Daniela was strained at best, but by the grace of God they had managed to find a way to keep the peace and maintain the normal business and ministries of the congregation.

Last month, however, Pastor Daniela asked the council to consider the use of an inclusive language Bible for the reading and proclamation of Scripture. As a result, the struggling relationship between Trig and Pastor Daniela began to deteriorate. For Trig, “that woman” was taking things too far. God is male, end of story. Trig was not willing to budge on this point. Although the topic remains on the agenda of the council, Trig has not been afraid to state his position in no uncertain terms, using phrases such as: “That’s not how we do things. The Bible cannot be rewritten. It’s the infallible word of God.”

Jessi, formerly unbeknownst to Trig and most of the world, identifies as transgender, and has only recently begun sharing this information with their close circle of family and friends. They had desired to tell Trig but, knowing Trig’s feelings and his attitude toward women, had been reluctant to fully disclose and thereby risk their professional and personal relationships. Rumors, however, began to spread when Jessi started wearing clothing of a more feminine nature. When confronted by Trig during a coffee break at work, Jessi finally admitted the truth and said that, in consultation with their physician, they were considering gender reassignment surgery to transition to female.

Three nights later at the end of their shift at the granary, Jessi set out for home. Before reaching their pick-up truck, Jessi was overpowered by three male individuals, brutally beaten, and hauled off to a non-descript cornfield where they were left for dead. Pastor Daniela arrived at the hospital just before midnight and was introduced to Jessi. Jessi, though not a member of Pastor Daniela’s congregation or any other congregation, was hopeful that a female pastor would understand some of their fears and concerns, perhaps even becoming an advocate, as they understood that the ELCA is accepting of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Plus (LGBTQIA+) persons and concerned about matters of social justice, including the rights of women.

Hearing Jessi’s story stirred up many feelings and memories for Pastor Daniela about her own experiences as a female who has experienced gender bias both personally and professionally. She finds herself needing to take action on behalf of women who have been repeatedly marginalized and mistreated by others who either willingly or ignorantly participate in gender bias. Even her own congregation has not been immune to this issue. As a first step, Pastor Daniela considers holding a prayer vigil for Jessi and other women who have experienced abuse and violence, but is concerned about how her congregation and the local community may respond.

Discussion Questions

Identify and discuss the areas of ethical tension between Trig and his friend Jessi. How might Trig’s own perceived patriarchal Christian identity respond to the revelation of the gender identity of Jessi, whom he once held in esteem?

How should Pastor Daniela, given her personal experiences with gender bias and patriarchy, navigate and balance her desires to address actively the issues surrounding gender bias with her pastoral responsibilities and care for her congregation, community, Jessi, and Trig?

Where are our next steps as the church-at-large in the twenty-first century to address “Faith, Sexism, and Justice?”

Authors: Maria Bonine, Charlotte Eversoll, Michelle Knight, Michael Szydlowski, and Kelly Ylitalo

Freed for Life: Living with the Mark of Incarceration

Social Statement: “The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries” (2013)

<https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Criminal-Justice>

Background

Word of Hope Lutheran Church is a congregation located in the Palmer Park neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan. Over the last thirty years the neighborhood has experienced a dramatic transformation, changing from one of the wealthier areas in the city, booming with industrial and manufacturing jobs, to a struggling neighborhood riddled with financial woes, exodus of businesses, rising rates of crime, and drastically “under-performing” schools. It is a neighborhood hit hard by the school-to-prison pipeline,¹ contributing to the staggering criminal justice statistics of the American criminal justice system, which locks up more people per capita than any other nation,² at the rate of 698 per 100,000 residents³ and currently incarcerates almost 2.3 million people nationwide.⁴

Drug use is prevalent,⁵ and neighborhood children experience many risk factors for addiction, which include a lack of parental supervision, chaotic home environments, community attitudes, availability of drugs at school, and community poverty.⁶ Using drugs affects, and even alters, the basal ganglia, extended amygdala, and prefrontal cortex—all of which are necessary for basic human

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functioning. These changes to the brain can result in compulsive drug use, which is addiction.⁷

Addiction fuels crime in the neighborhood; drug possession sends many people to jail with drug offenses accounting nationally for the incarceration of almost half a million people, with over one million drug possession arrests each year.⁸ Approximately half of prison and jail inmates meet the criteria for substance abuse or dependence, with a significant percentage of crimes being committed while under the influence of drugs.⁹ The correlation with drug addiction among drug traffickers, however, is not clearly defined due to limitations in self-reporting.

Despite the high number of drug-related charges, far more people continue to be jailed for violent and property offenses.¹⁰

1. “Discipline and the School to Prison Pipeline,” *National Education Association* (2016) <https://ra.nea.org/business-item/2016-pol-e01-2/> (accessed October 2019).

2. In the United States of America this includes those held in jails, state prisons, federal prisons, private correctional institutions, immigration detention centers, military prisons, juvenile detention centers, Indian country jails, territorial prisons, and civil commitment. Leah Sakala and Pete Wagner, “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie,” *Prison Policy Initiative* (March 2014) <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie.html> (accessed December 2019).

3. Wendy Sawyer and Pete Wagner, “States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2018,” *Prison Policy Initiative* (June 2018) <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html> (accessed October 2019).

4. Mariel Alper and Matthew R. Durose, Joshua Markman, “2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period,” Bureau of Justice Statistics (2018) <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/csfcf05.pdf> (accessed October 2019).

5. “In 2018, approximately 20.3 million people aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder related to their use of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year.” “Addiction Statistics,” *Addiction Center* (2019) <https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/addiction-statistics/> (accessed November 28, 2019).

6. “Science of Addiction,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (July 2018), <https://d14rmgrtrwz5a.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/soa.pdf>, 5 (accessed October 2019).

7. *Ibid.*, 16.

8. FBI: UCR, “2017 Crime in the United States,” *FBI* (2017), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017/tables/arrest-table> (accessed October 2019).

9. The Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights, “Incarceration, Substance Abuse, and Addiction” (2019) <https://www.prisonerhealth.org/educational-resources/factsheets-2/incarceration-substance-abuse-and-addiction/> (accessed November 2019).

10. Samuel R. Bondurant, Jason M. Lindo, and Isaac D. Swensen, “Substance Abuse Treatment Centers and Local Crime,” *NBER Working Paper Series* (September 2016) <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22610.pdf> (accessed November 2019).

Of the 2.3 million incarcerated people, 76% of them have not yet been convicted of a crime, as jail incarceration rates are driven largely by local bail practices.¹¹ This is directly linked to people who can afford to make bail (median bail cost is \$10,000) and therefore can leave jail while they await their trial, versus those who do not have the economic resources to do so and must stay in jail while they wait for a conviction.¹² These practices have impacted the impoverished Palmer Park neighborhood, with many people away from their families for long stretches of time as they await their trials. They simply cannot afford the high cost of bail required to escape pretrial detention.¹³

Racism is an issue that perpetuates the injustices of the Palmer Park neighborhood, as people of color—who statistically face much greater rates of poverty—are dramatically overrepresented in the criminal justice system. African Americans, for instance, make up 40% of the incarcerated population,¹⁴ while constituting only 13% of U.S. residents.¹⁵

Many studies¹⁶ indicate that prison sentences do not reduce the criminal involvement of former inmates. Rather, “most criminologists would predict that, on balance, offenders become more, rather than less, criminally oriented due to their prison experience.”¹⁷ Recidivism (release and rearrest) is typical. In a nine-year follow-up period, an estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested (either due to new crimes or technical violations) within three years, 79% within six years, and 83% within nine years.¹⁸ Appropriate rehabilitation reduces recidivism, while inappropriate treatment during imprisonment increases recidivism.¹⁹ Drug usage and addiction contribute to higher likelihood of recidivism, with up to 77% recidivating. Among drug trafficking offenders released prior to age 21, 65% recidivated.²⁰

11. Ram Subramian, Ruth Delaney, Stephen Roberts, Nancy Fishman, and Peggy McGarry, “Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America,” *Vera: Institute of Justice* (February 2015) https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/incarcerations-front-door-report_02.pdf (accessed October 2019).

12. “Criminal Justice Policy Program,” *Harvard School of Law*, <https://cjdebtreform.org/> (accessed October 2019).

13. Bernadette Rabuy and Daniel Kopf, “Prisons of Poverty: Uncovering the Pre-incarceration Incomes of the Imprisoned,” *Prison Policy Initiative* (July 2015) <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html> (accessed October 2019).

14. Sakala and Wagner, “Mass Incarceration.”

15. “Quick Facts,” *United States Census*, (2018) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218> (accessed October 2019).

16. Including five methodological studies outlined by Francis T. Cullen, Cheryl Lero Jonson, and Daniel S. Nagin, “Prisons Do Not Reduce Recidivism: The High Cost of Ignoring Science,” *The Prison Journal* (July 2011) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0032885511415224> (accessed November 2019).

17. Ibid.

18. Alper, et al., “2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism.”

19. Paula Smith, Claire Goggin, and Paul Gendreau, *The Effects of Prison Sentences and Intermediate Sanctions on Recidivism: General Effects and Individual Differences*. (Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada, 2002).

20. “Recidivism Among Federal Drug Trafficking Offenders,” *United States Sentencing Commission*, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2017/20170221_Recidivism-Drugs.pdf, 9 (accessed November 2019).

Case Study

Word of Hope has felt the impact of the neighborhood’s crime, as they have been victim to multiple burglaries over the last few years. Despite this, the congregation continues to flourish, with most of its membership living in the upper-middle class Palmer Woods neighborhood just to the north. Although most members long-ago moved from Palmer Park to Palmer Woods, they continue to attend Word of Hope and participate in its ministries.

After forty years serving Word of Hope, the church’s beloved custodian, Bill, is ready to retire. Bill was a young child when his family helped found the church; he served the congregation with meticulous care and great joy, yet he has been ready to step out of the role for months now. Unfortunately, the search for a new custodian has slowly dragged on without any serious candidates. At this point, the maintenance of the church building and property has fallen by the wayside and a new custodian is desperately needed.

Pastor Sarah, the solo pastor, has been with Word of Hope for three years. She is the first new pastor after the departure of the previous pastor of fifteen years. Pastor Sarah has made multiple changes in the congregation over the last three years, some geared toward reintegrating the congregation with the local neighborhood. These changes have been met with reluctance and a concern that she is overly focused on social justice. The congregation council has specifically expressed that she is expecting too much of the congregation.

Last week Pastor Sarah received two applications for the custodial position. The first applicant, Richard, is 55 years old. He recently lost his corporate job due to downsizing. Richard has no custodial experience, but he and his family have been members of the church for twenty years. He is well-known and actively involved in many of the church’s ministries. The second applicant, Terrence, is 37 years old. He is not a member, although he has attended a few Sunday services over the last year.

After bringing Terrence in for an introductory conversation, Pastor Sarah and the head of the congregation’s Personnel Committee learn that Terrence has lived a rough life. He grew up only a few blocks from Word of Hope, had no father figure in his life, and his mother struggled to provide for their family. Terrence met his wife when he was 17, and she, then 16 years old, soon became pregnant. Although Terrence tried to join the workforce, the lack of manufacturing jobs and other unskilled labor positions made it difficult to earn enough money to support the growing family.

At the age of 23, Terrence was married with four children. His wife had dropped out of high school to care for their children, while Terrence and his mother continued to struggle to find sufficient work. Trapped and desperate, Terrence turned to dealing drugs. He was soon arrested on charges of drug trafficking and sentenced to six years in prison. He was released after thirty-six months on account of good behavior.

Following his release, Terrence returned to his neighborhood

https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2017/20170221_Recidivism-Drugs.pdf, 9 (accessed November 2019).

and again faced the challenge of finding work, a task now even more difficult because of his criminal record. He ended up starting a cleaning company and was able to find a few businesses willing to take a chance on him. Over the next seven years, Terrence was able to obtain several more clients and for a while sustain his family. But in 2015 the economy took a dramatic downturn and many of the businesses remaining in Palmer Park either closed or moved away. Terrence's cleaning business was greatly impacted. Of the twenty clients he had, now only two remained; the income from these contracts was not enough to meet his family's basic needs.

Eight years after he was first released, Terrence was again arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison for the same drug trafficking charges that had first landed him behind bars. Much to his family's relief, he was again released early. Soon thereafter, Terrence discovered the custodial position at Word of Hope. He feels this job could be the answer to his family's acute need for an honest, stable income and believes he is qualified to do the work needed.

Pastor Sarah feels immense pressure to make the right decision, especially because of the resistance she has encountered for the changes made since being called as Word of Hope's pastor. She is also concerned about minimizing the impact this change in staffing will have on the congregation. Pastor Sarah, along with the head of the Personnel Committee, is meeting with the full congregation council tomorrow night to discuss the applicants to fill Bill's custodial position.

Discussion Questions

How would you structure the conversation at the congregation's council meeting?

What role does race play in the ethical dilemma of this case? Addiction?

Who should Word of Hope hire to be their new custodian? Why? How would trends in recidivism influence your hiring decision?

What responsibility does the church-at-large hold for criminal justice reform?

Authors: Tony Acompanado, Corinna Bader, Kellie Lisi, and Jason Poole-Xiong

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Pharmacogenomics and the Opioid Crisis

Social Statement: “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” (2011)

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Genetics>

Background

Over the past two decades, the nation has faced a growing epidemic of opioid use disorder (OUD) and opioid addiction, fueled in part by misinformation about the impact of commonly prescribed pain medications among patients with addiction vulnerabilities. In a pharmaceutical market driven by voluminous prescription writing, the opioid crisis has exploded across the nation. It is estimated that 48.5 million people have used illicit drugs or misused prescription drugs.¹ The economic impact of the opioid crisis is estimated to be in excess of \$500 billion per year.² Over 200,000 Americans have died as a direct result of opioid use. The scope of this problem has not yet peaked.

Opioid pain medicines are produced as natural, synthetic, or semi-synthetic compounds that interact with a person’s nerve cells to reduce the intensity of the pain. Physicians have been trained to use opioids for acute pain or for pain treatment in cancer or palliative care. Prescription opioids were thought to be safe when taken over short durations or when directed by an attending physician. However, opioid tolerance, opioid dependence, opioid use disorder, and opioid addiction have become a modern healthcare crisis.

By 1998, evidence of a link between opioid use disorder and genetic vulnerabilities among users was documented.³ It is estimated that up to half of opioid addictions are “attributable to genetic factors.”⁴ Pursuing an individualized medical treatment based on genetic susceptibilities may “help to individualize treatment to achieve dosage optimization for patients with opioid use disorder, to reduce and avert the onset of withdrawal symptoms, and to optimize opioid pain management for persons without

In its social statement, “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility,” the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) encourages “human imagination and innovation in the use of genetic knowledge to address physical and mental conditions, relieve human suffering, and improve the human situation.” At the same time, the ELCA recognizes that “genetic knowledge and its applications are not morally neutral. They require our diligent and sustained attention to direct potential good and limit potential harm.

dependence.”⁵ This pharmacogenomic approach is based upon “the influence of genetic variation on drug response in patients by correlating gene expression or single-nucleotide polymorphisms with a drug’s efficacy or toxicity.”⁶ Pharmacogenomics can be simply defined as “the study of how genes affect a person’s response to drugs.”⁷

Pharmacogenomics shows great promise in providing individualized pain management. At the same time, it raises ethical

1. “Opioid Basics,” Opioid Overdose, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (accessed November 20, 2019). <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html>

2. The Council of Economic Advisers, “The Underestimated Cost of the Opioid Crisis” (Washington, D.C., Executive Office of the President, November 2017).

3. Ming T. Tsuang, Michael J. Lyons, Joanne M. Meyer, et al., “Co-occurrence of Abuse of Different Drugs in Men: The Role of Drug-specific and Shared Vulnerabilities,” *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 55(11) (November 1998): 967–972. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.55.11.967>

4. Yasmin L. Hurd and Charles P. O’Brien, “Molecular Genetics and New Medication Strategies for Opioid Addiction,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* (August 2, 2018): published online. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2018.18030352>

5. Ibid.

6. T. P. Aneesh, Sekhar M. Sonal, Jose Asha, Chandran Lekshmi, and Mary Zachariah Subin, “Pharmacogenomics: The Right Drug to the Right Person,” *Journal of Clinical Medicine Research* 1, no.4 (Oct 2009): 191–194. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4021%2Fjocmr2009.08.1255>

7. “What is pharmacogenomics?” (Genetics Home Reference, U.S. National Library of Medicine). <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/primer/genomicresearch/pharmacogenomics>

concerns, yet to be fully considered. In January 2018, a group of scientists and clinicians developed a Genetic Addiction Risk Score (GARS™) as a predictor of vulnerability to opioid dependence.⁸ The widespread availability of this and other similar genetic testing raises ethical questions about who should access and use the information. Should a health insurance company, for instance, be informed of an individual's genetic risk of opioid misuse or addiction? How might that information be used to establish premiums or treatment plans? Could or should the genetic testing be mandated by providers, health insurance companies, or even state agencies? How can it be ensured that genetic discrimination does not occur?

The advances in genetic mapping and pharmacology have spurred conversation among faith-based communities who are seeking to respond at the intersection of science and its human impact. In its social statement, "Genetics, Faith and Responsibility," the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) encourages "human imagination and innovation in the use of genetic knowledge to address physical and mental conditions, relieve human suffering, and improve the human situation."⁹ At the same time, the ELCA recognizes that "genetic knowledge and its applications are not morally neutral. They require our diligent and sustained attention to direct potential good and limit potential harm."¹⁰ Given the myriad ethical considerations, including the possibility of public or private entities using genetic information to disproportionately limit the health care of those on the margins, the ELCA asserts several guiding principles in genetic exploration.

The *precautionary* principle calls for wisdom in the face of uncertain knowledge, urging that "when human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, action shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm."¹¹

The principle of *solidarity* lifts up the thread of kinship that runs through all creation by God's creative activity. It finds a "moral duty" to make research and application decisions in ways that embody the local and global interdependence of all individuals and cultures—including affluent and resource-poor nations. This principle raises the question of benefit, encourages that genetic research become widely available, and encourages mindfulness around how research is done or incentivized.¹²

The principle of *participation* finds that genetic research, its applications, and commercialization "require public accountability." The ELCA advocates that the interests of all living things—present and future—be heard and respected in policymaking, implementation, and evaluation. Further, the ELCA warns "against genetic

The scenario offers an opportunity to reflect on the application of the guiding principles in the ELCA social statement within the context of a family dispute, a civic debate, and a theological discussion at a congregational Bible study.

determinism and the association of the genetic code with original sin," either in civic conversation or the realm of research. The caution centers around the concern that "genetic determinists may claim gene expression as an explanation for original sin or the source of an inborn propensity for evil."¹³

This case study depicts a situation in which a pharmacogenomic approach to the opioid crisis interfaces with people in an ELCA congregation. The scenario offers an opportunity to reflect on the application of the guiding principles in the ELCA social statement within the context of a family dispute, a civic debate, and a theological discussion at a congregational Bible study. At the center of the case, the pastor must navigate the complexities of genetics, faith, and responsibility from a variety of perspectives.

Case Study

You serve as pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio. The Burke family members belong to your congregation, and their young adult son, James, has struggled mightily with opioid use disorder (OUD). James' mom, Sophie, has responded with extensive self-education about the genetic (familial) predisposition to addiction out of her fear that someone else in her family might also be susceptible to OUD. She has insisted that genetic testing be conducted for all of her children. The genetic testing shows that all three have a high Genetic Addiction Risk Score (GARS™), according to a genetic test that Sophie ordered on Amazon.

Subsequently, Sophie has denied her family members all opioid pain management, even when prescribed by their physician. For instance, when her youngest son broke his arm in a football game, Sophie did not allow him to take prescribed pain medication. Now, Lucille, her 85-year-old mother has fallen and broken her hip. Again, Sophie is insisting that no opioid pain medications be administered, even when indicated for acute fracture. Sophie's husband, Tom, has come to you asking for help in approaching Sophie about following their medical doctor's pain management recommendations for both his son and mother-in-law.

You have also been reflecting on recent coverage of a news conference by your district's representative to the state legislature. In

8. Kenneth Blum, et al., "Genetic addiction risk score (GARS)™, a predictor of vulnerability to opioid dependence," *Frontiers in Bioscience, Elite* 10 (Jan 1, 2018):175–196. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28930612>

9. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "A Social Statement on Genetics, Faith and Responsibility," (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2011), 20.

10. *Ibid.*, 2.

11. *Ibid.*, 27.

12. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

13. *Ibid.*, 12.

the news conference the legislative representative cited recent CDC data showing Ohio has the second highest overdose death rate in the country.¹⁴ She spoke to the impact of the opioid epidemic on the state budget—from health care and Medicaid to criminal justice and the foster care system. The representative specifically noted that across the country, more than a third of non-elderly Medicaid recipients struggled with opioid addiction. Citing recent developments in pharmacogenomics, she announced her introduction of a bill that would require all Medicaid recipients at the state's expense to undergo genetic testing to assess predisposition to addiction. The bill would authorize Medicaid providers to use that information to inform provision of care.

You receive the newsletter from the congregation where the state representative is a member, in order to stay in touch with programming at area congregations. You notice that the representative is leading an upcoming Bible study series titled “Scientific Advances in Biblical Perspective: Addiction and Original Sin.” You are concerned that a biblical basis might be used to advance the representative's proposal in the legislature. You also know how deeply your congregant, Sophie, relies on Scripture and theological beliefs to guide her decisions. You wonder if an original sin framework for viewing addiction may be filtering into the community, distorting the way Sophie views the struggles of her oldest son as he deals with his opioid use disorder.

14. “Drug Overdose Mortality by State,” National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (accessed December 3, 2019). https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm

Discussion Questions

How would you advise Tom to engage the situation around both the required genetic testing of family members and withholding prescribed pain medication? What principles from the ELCA social statement do you bring to your position?

Assume you decided to write an op-ed for the local newspaper about the proposed bill. What position will you take on the bill? What will be your primary arguments as a local faith leader?

What theological basis would you use to respond to those who equate genetic vulnerability to addiction with original sin? How might you refer to the ELCA Social Statement to support your response?

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Peace in the Midst of Conflict

Social Statement: “For Peace in God’s World” (1995)

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>

Background

Two weeks ago, Trinity Episcopal Church, which is approximately three miles from Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Sharon, Texas, experienced an armed robbery. At three o’clock on a quiet Friday afternoon, when only the female administrative assistant was on the premises, a 20-year-old male entered the building through the front door of the church, walked into the main office where the administrative assistant was working, held her up with a handgun, and demanded access to whatever cash was on hand. The administrative assistant complied. After gaining access to the office storage room and filing cabinet where the money was kept, the burglar restrained her in a chair with cord and duct tape. He then gathered the money and placed it in a small duffel bag he had brought.

At that moment the church building manager, who had been off-site for a meeting, returned to the office and walked unknowingly into the storeroom to retrieve a file. His arrival startled the burglar, leading to an altercation in which the building manager was shot and left unresponsive. The burglar was able to escape with the money; however, the suspect was apprehended by police several hours later and positively identified by the staff person. The building manager later died at the local hospital.

The suspect believed to have committed the crime was a convicted felon who had escaped earlier that day from a large detention center in the neighboring community of Westby, just a few miles away, and one that employs many people in Sharon. The community was in a state of shock after the incident.

The people at Trinity Episcopal Church are mourning the loss of a long-standing member and trusted employee of their congregation. Members of other congregations within the community are beginning to react to the news and are contemplating action. The rise of gun violence in the nation, including recent shootings within several religious communities, has increased the level of tension. The CDC reported that in 2017, deaths by firearm reached their highest level since it began keeping records—nearly 40,000 deaths, a 33% increase over twenty years ago.¹ At least twenty fatal

The rise of gun violence in the nation, including recent shootings within several religious communities, has increased the level of tension. The CDC reported that in 2017, deaths by firearm reached their highest level since it began keeping records—nearly 40,000 deaths, a 33% increase over twenty years ago. At least twenty fatal shootings have occurred in U.S. places of worship since 1999.

shootings have occurred in U.S. places of worship since 1999.²

Case Study

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church is located in Sharon, Texas, a medium-sized city with a population of 35,000, located two hours outside of Houston. Pastor Dana has served as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church for ten years. The congregation has an average of 200 people at Sunday worship.

Pastor Dana and the leadership of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church are preparing for their first congregation council meeting following the tragic murder at another local church. Typically, members of the congregation not serving on council do not attend council meetings. However, in anticipation of many people desiring to attend and make their concerns known at this meeting, the leadership has determined there will be only one agenda item: how will Prince of Peace respond to this violence and what measures will be taken to add security to the church?

1. Morgan Gstalter, “CDC Report: US Gun Deaths Reach Highest Level in Nearly 40 Years,” *TheHill.com*, December 13, 2018. <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/421306-cdc-report-us-gun-deaths-reach-highest-level-in-nearly-40-years>

2. Aaron Earls, “How Common Are Church Shootings?” *Facts and Trends*, May 21, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/05/21/how-likely-are-u-s-church-shootings>

In the wake of the shooting, people have shared diverse ideas regarding church safety. Some members want to increase security measures within the church. Some ideas being discussed include hiring armed guards during Sunday worship and installing a security system in the building. Another church member has offered to pay for greeters and ushers on Sunday morning to be trained as a Security Team. They wonder if an organization like “Sheepdog Church Security”³ could be helpful at this time. Others think that the church should not waste money on hiring armed guards or installing security systems. They feel that the church’s exterior door locks are adequate.

Additionally, the children’s ministry coordinator is concerned about safety during the week, noting that the burglary at Trinity Episcopal Church targeted a time when few people were expected to be at the church. She feels anxious because she is often in the church alone. She also notes that some middle-schoolers ride the extracurricular bus to the church on Wednesday afternoons, in order to get to confirmation after sports practice, making them an especially vulnerable group.

The coordinator of the prison ministry has stated he does not want to see the congregation turn their backs on the people with whom he feels Jesus has called them to minister. However, two members believe that the congregation should withdraw from their active prison ministry, claiming the recent escape proves that safety measures at the detention center are inadequate, and that the congregation could be held liable if anything should happen.

Another point of contention is whether the doors to the church should be locked during worship on Sundays. Some have wondered whether, once worship begins, all exterior doors to the building should be locked and no one allowed into the building. Others think this will cause problems and send an inhospitable message to guests and the community at large.

The council president is an employee of the Westby detention center. One of the ideas that he presented to Pastor Dana in private was to ask for church members who are licensed to carry a concealed handgun to wear them anytime they are going to church. He notes that “a good guy with a gun” potentially limited casualties in another shooting at Sutherland Springs.⁴

On the same day, Pastor Dana received several emails from members openly stating their conviction that weapons do not belong in a church building under any circumstances. The council treasurer, a law enforcement officer herself, pointed out that non-professionals carrying guns, who have not been tested under pressure, may constitute a danger to others despite their best intentions.⁵

Pastor Dana read an article in *Scientific American* that cites research from the *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, which attests that “a gun is 22 times more likely to be used in a criminal assault, an accidental death or injury, a suicide attempt, or a homicide than it is for self-defense.”⁶ She is also wondering where Jesus’ call to be peacemakers fits into the congregation’s ministry at this time. Already tempers are flaring within the congregation itself.

The council as a whole is aware that this meeting could be contentious, and members are praying for guidance and wisdom. The executive board of the council could not even come to an agreement about whether to open the special meeting with prayer and the following vow of non-violence that was suggested by Pastor Dana:

I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus:

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence; by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.⁷

Pastor Dana is weighing all of these opinions and concerns, and she wonders how best to shepherd the congregation through this meeting.

Discussion Questions

If you were Pastor Dana, how would you try to structure the upcoming congregation council meeting?

Do weapons have a place in houses of worship? If so, what? If not, why?

How can Pastor Dana guide the differing viewpoints within the congregation toward reconciliation?

How is the church-at-large called to peace in this case?

Authors: Barbara Cox, Clayton Faulkner, Kathryn Kieckhafer, and Connie Monson

3. Sheepdog Church Security. <https://sheepdogchurchsecurity.net>

4. Michael J. Mooney, “The Hero of the Sutherland Springs Shooting is Still Grappling with What Happened That Day.” *Texas Monthly* (November 2018), Last modified October 28, 2018. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/stephen-willeford-sutherland-springs-mass-murder/>

5. Michael Shermer, “The Science of Guns Proves That Arming Untrained Citizens is a Bad Idea,” *Scientific American* 308.5 (May 2013). Last modified May 1, 2013. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/gun-science-proves-arming-untrained-citizens-bad-idea/>

6. Ibid.

7. Eileen Egan and the Rev. John Dear, “Vow of Non-Violence,” Pax Christi USA. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://paxchristiusa.org/resources/vow-of-nonviolence/>

Claiming Creation as Our Neighbor

Social Statement: “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice” (1993)

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

Background

God created the earth and everything in it and called all creation, not just humankind, “good.”¹ The ELCA social statement “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice” names this theological principle and thereby an understanding that humans have “special roles on behalf of the whole of creation.” The statement affirms that humans, “made in the image of God, are called to care for, serve, and keep the earth as God cares for and keeps humans.”² Thus, humans have a responsibility to creation itself as well as a responsibility to care for the neighbor.³

Choices humans make affect creation and neighbor. Humans have exploited and degraded creation, harming the environment and intensifying social injustices that hurt other humans.

The relationship between human activity and environmental change is well-documented and unprecedented. While early lifeforms such as cyanobacteria altered the earth’s atmosphere, humans are the only species that has had so profound and rapid an impact *while being capable of doing otherwise*.

This uniquely human capability has led many climatologists and geologists to dub the modern era the *Anthropocene*, the human age.⁴ For example, climate change is negatively affecting people across the African continent and specifically in the country of Tanzania. Rising temperatures and flooding has allowed malaria-carrying mosquitoes to flourish: “Where malaria exacts the largest burden, Africa, it has been extremely difficult to control. Many reasons account for this: an efficient mosquito that transmits the infection, a high prevalence of the most deadly species of the parasite, favorable climate, weak infrastructure to address the disease, and high intervention costs.”⁵ In Tanzania, these factors disrupt

Humans are the only species that has had so profound and rapid an impact while being capable of doing otherwise. This uniquely human capability has led many climatologists and geologists to dub the modern era the Anthropocene, the human age.

the raising of crops and livestock, putting food sources at risk.⁶

Understanding humans’ role as stewards of creation,⁷ it should not be a surprise to Christians that we have the power to dramatically alter natural systems through our actions. This capacity brought about the highest global standard of living and lowest rates of violence in recorded history. However, the benefits of these advances have not been equally shared, and the way we have used natural resources has resulted in the sixth largest extinction event in earth’s history.⁸ This places the livelihood and safety of the most vulnerable people in jeopardy.⁹ Balancing the theological, ethical, and scientific dimensions of care for creation is a complicated task that can lead to rich conversation.

6. “Climate Risk Profile-Tanzania” CDC pg.2 June 2018. <https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/climate-risk-profile-tanzania>

7. Genesis 2:7-8 (NRSV).

8. S. L. Pimm, C. N. Jenkins, R. Abell, T. M. Brooks, J. L. Gittleman, L. N. Joppa, P. H. Raven, C. M. Roberts, and J. O. Sexton. “The Biodiversity of Species and Their Rates of Extinction, Distribution, and Protection.” *Science* 344, no. 6187 (May 30, 2014): 1246752–1246752. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1246752>

9. V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.). “Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.” *IPCC* (2018) In Press.

1. Genesis 1:31 (NRSV).

2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. “Minutes from the Third Churchwide Assembly.” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993. <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

3. Mark 12:30-31 (NRSV).

4. Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Alan Smith, Tiffany L. Barry, Angela L. Coe, Paul R. Bown, Patrick Brechley, et al. “Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene.” *GSA Today* 18, no. 2 (2008): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1130/GSAT01802A.1>

5. “How Can Malaria Cases and Deaths Be Reduced” CDC, July 23, 2018. <https://www.climatelinks.org/countries/tanzania>

Case Study

For more than forty years, Milele Parish in Morogoro, Tanzania, and Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Hoquiam, Washington, have had a partner relationship. Milele Parish runs an orphanage to care for children who have lost parents to malaria or AIDS. For many years, Beautiful Savior shipped supplies (medicine, formula, and treated mosquito nets) to Milele Parish. As the ELCA has encouraged a model of accompaniment for mission support, the two congregations embraced the understanding that without relationships, money and supplies risk paternalism and objectify the lives of their siblings in Christ.

Accompaniment is critical to the identities of these congregations. The people of Beautiful Savior decided to personally deliver supplies. The youth from Beautiful Savior now travel annually to Milele to bring supplies that are either unavailable or too expensive to buy locally, because of tariffs, political unrest, and business practices. The medicine and nets in particular have been important in fighting malaria. These efforts have been part of the ELCA Malaria Campaign, which is working with the World Health Organization and UNICEF to eliminate malaria in Africa. Between 2000 and 2015, malaria deaths in Africa fell by 60 percent; 6.2 million lives saved.¹⁰ Malaria deaths in Milele have fallen at a similar rate.

As important as the life-saving benefits of this trip are the personal multi-generational relationships that have been formed. Adults in the congregations who became friends in the late 1980s, now have children who are connecting. This partnership has created a culture at the two churches that is focused on the global church, impacting the congregations' missions, as well as Beautiful Savior's mission support to the ELCA. The people of Beautiful Savior understand that their consumption-driven lifestyle impacts their neighbors, including those they love and know halfway around the world.

Now it is time once again for the Beautiful Savior youth to plan the trip, but a new factor has come to light. Climate strikes have brought to the attention of the young people concern about the environment, specifically about air travel, which is the least carbon-efficient mode of transportation.¹¹ At a trip planning meeting, a youth group member, Abigail, brings up the fact that climate activist Greta Thunberg recently traveled to the United States on a racing yacht powered by solar panels and underwater turbines. "Should we really be traveling to Tanzania on airplanes?" Abigail asks. "This feels irresponsible based on the effects of climate change, not only on the world but especially on people in developing countries like Tanzania. Don't they suffer more from climate change than people in the U.S.? Our ELCA social statement says that we as affluent people have a responsibility to cut carbon emissions for the sake of neighbor. It even has a name for

this: 'tithing environmentally.'"¹²

Abigail provided the group with data. According to the 2018 report by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), human-driven CO₂ emissions will drive the average temperature of Earth up by 2°C by 2055 if emission patterns do not change drastically. The IPCC believes that with warming of 2°C, natural carbon sinks (forests, oceans, and permafrost) will begin to reverse course, and actually begin releasing carbon into the atmosphere. This will create a vicious cycle, in which more carbon leads to more warming, leading in turn to more carbon, in a cycle that is beyond our capacity to slow. If we achieve net-zero global emissions by 2050, it is estimated that global temperature change would be held to 1.5°C. The benefits of that small change in total temperature could be measured in hundreds of millions of human lives, trillions of dollars, and the preservation of entire biomes.¹³

Abigail's data stops the conversation in its tracks. She then offers that she has checked on how much carbon an airplane trip from Seattle-Tacoma International through San Francisco and Istanbul to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, would add to the atmosphere: 86.44 metric tons for ten people.¹⁴ Abigail found that higher temperatures are linked to negative health outcomes, such as increases in hunger, violence, and disease transmission, including malaria.¹⁵ She wonders whether the extra carbon emissions required to fly ten people to Tanzania (as opposed to shipping supplies) ultimately creates more problems than it would solve.

The other young people in the group start to chime in with questions: What about the costs of car transportation for this trip? Do we impact the local food sources by being there? The adults who are helping to plan the trip are shocked. They call for a break, huddling together. A chaperone, Sam, who traveled to Tanzania as a teen, asks: "What are they thinking? This is important to Milele! Will our partners feel like we've abandoned them?" The adults agree that environmental concern is not as important to Milele as supplies and relationships. They will persuade the youth to go. When the group reconvenes, the youth are unconvinced.

Discussion Questions

How did you see the balance between caring for creation and caring for neighbor in this case? Where do these concerns intersect and where do they diverge? What theological convictions guide your discernment?

10. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "ELCA Malaria Campaign Executive Report." *ELCA* (2014). http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Malaria_Executive_Report.pdf

11. "Preliminary US Emissions Estimates for 2018." *Rhodium Group* (blog). Accessed October 9, 2019. <https://rhg.com/research/preliminary-us-emissions-estimates-for-2018/>

12. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Third Church-wide Assembly." Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *ELCA.org*, 1993. download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS.pdf?_ga=2.207015898.836490580.1570567763-629655071.1564423863

13. V. Masson-Delmotte, et al. "IPCC Special Report" (56-64, 253-264).

14. <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/>

15. Noriko Endo, Teresa Yamana, and Elfatih A B Eltahir. "Impact of Climate Change on Malaria in Africa: A Combined Modelling and Observational Study." *The Lancet* 389 (April 2017): S7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)31119-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)31119-4)

What are some cultural, spiritual, and financial challenges in fulfilling the commitments outlined in the social statement?

What should Beautiful Savior do? Are there ways to honor their relationship with Milele *and* their responsibility to the earth?

How can you address the reality of climate change in your own lifestyle? How can you address the reality of climate change through advocacy?

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