



Wednesday Prayer

14th Sunday after Pentecost – We have a Responsibility

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17

We have many social statements in the ELCA "to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues" and to help us engage and "participate in God's work in the world."¹ We have a responsibility to our neighbor.

This passage, while helpful for general problem resolution, can be unattainable for those who are most vulnerable or for those who have been greatly harmed by another. Audrey West of Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, PA upholds, "It may be unsafe and perhaps even life-threatening for one person to call out the sin of another when the two are alone."

Therefore, **we** "are responsible for assuring accountability while also safeguarding those who are most vulnerable or at risk."² I have had numerous survivors of sexual assault that happened within the church share their story with me. Tragically, they had not felt safe to share their account within the church, or for those who did, some were shunned or not believed. Church, we have a long way to go in caring for each other.

In 2001, the ELCA adopted a [Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation](#) that states, "Love born of faith in Jesus Christ **calls us all to** attend to, discuss, resist, and change the system of commercial sexual exploitation." "To a large extent, this exploitation remains hidden from public attention and ignored by church and society."

In 2015, the ELCA adopted a [Social Message on Gender-based Violence](#) that states, "Gender-based violence...is a sin that Christians need to recognize, understand and confront, for our religious history also bears its stain." And this history continues today.

To move forward, let us come together to not only study these statements, but to engage in the work of healing for survivors and in the work of prevention to ensure we are fulfilling our responsibility to protect and care for all of God's children. Start with a small Zoom group to study, and see where the Spirit leads you.

God of healing, help us listen to those who have been harmed, accompanying them in their truth, speaking and advocating for accountability, and leading the way for change in the Church and in society. Amen.

¹ <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4558

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