



Who? Me?

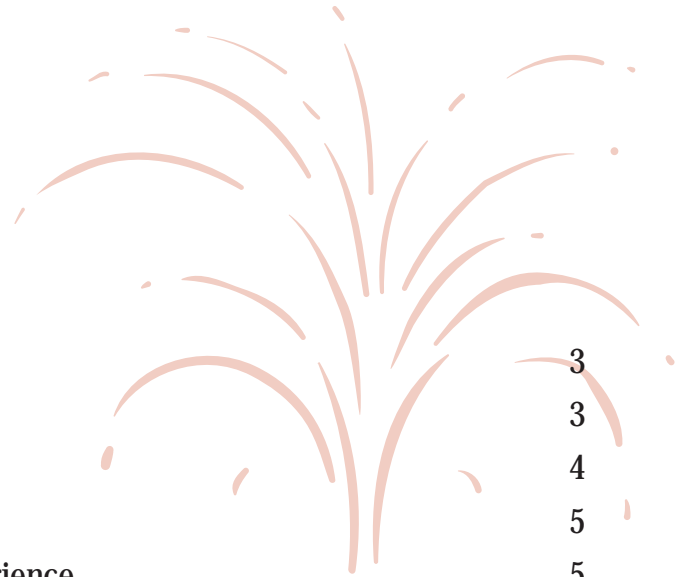


Women of faith making a difference





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Credits

Writer: Doris Strieter

Editors: Laurel Hensel and Barbara Hofmaier

Graphic designer: Sharon Schuster

Project manager: Doris Strieter

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Introduction

Reading this resource is the first step in your journey toward tackling tough and painful issues. As you learn about injustice next door and around the world, you will also learn about yourself. Your courage and curiosity are commendable. God bless you!

Remember that working for justice is not a quick and easy process. It is easier to *talk* about justice issues than to be involved in actually *doing* justice work. Get ready for a long-term commitment involving both reflection and action. This resource offers guidance that will sustain your efforts.

In this justice journey, your actions emerge *after* Bible study, prayer, reflection, listening, research, and careful planning. Through these actions you serve as God's hands and feet in the world.

How to use this resource

You're reading this resource because (a) you feel the tug inside yourself to *do* something about the pain you see around you; and/or (b) you're a leader in your Women of the ELCA unit.

This resource will help you *as an individual* to move beyond that overwhelming where-do-I-start feeling to concrete involvement. As with any justice issue, the key is to "give it a face"—to meet the people for whom the issue is real. Once that happens, you will get unstuck and begin to feel the rewards of doing what your heart tells you is right.

This step-by-step resource will help you *as a group* to move toward addressing any number of justice issues—violence, abuse, poverty, education, and housing—that have a direct impact on women, children, and families in your community. As you learn more about the issue at hand, you'll also learn that by working together you *can* make a real difference. What could be more exciting?

*And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*
—Micah 6:8



Getting started

This resource works well as a study and discussion guide while your group discerns the next steps in its justice journey. It also works well as an action guide, giving specific directions on how to start.

Provide enough copies of *Who? Me?* for each member of your core planning group. After getting an overview, consider this suggested outline for use. Adapt as needed.

- 1st meeting** Read “Before Taking the First Step” and “Step 1: Get Firsthand Experience.” Discuss the “For reflection” section. Take time to consider the phone calls, connections, and invitations you need to make to get the momentum going. Resist feeling overwhelmed—you’re just getting started.
- 2nd meeting** Read “Step 2: Prepare for New Partners at the Table” and “Step 3: Find Assets within Your Community.” Have fun discussing the possibilities ahead. Sketch a flexible timeline for next actions. Sometimes “prompts” serve as gentle reminders. Spend time on the “For reflection” sections.
- 3rd meeting** Share what you’ve discovered since your last meeting. Wrestle with what you found disturbing. Rejoice in the signs of hope you saw. Welcome your new partners. Take time to get to know each other. Be clear about your purpose. Discuss your community assessment. Are there additional institutions and leaders you still plan to contact?
- 4th meeting** Take “Step 4: Identify Issues and Look for Causes” and “Step 5: Select an Issue.” It’s time to scale down the scope of your journey to a manageable size. Resist the temptation to tackle more issues than the size and energy of your group can reasonably handle. As your focus becomes clearer, so does the task ahead. Don’t skimp on gathering information. At the same time, review your timeline and keep moving!
- 5th meeting** Become the voice for the voiceless. Bring Christian values and vision to the issue(s) you’ve selected. Study “Step 6: Become Advocates” and “Step 7: Develop an Action Plan.” These sections are rich with activities to consider. The planning sheet is crucial. Pace yourself for the marathon ahead rather than the short sprint that leaves you winded. Don’t forget the “For reflection” sections.
- 6th meeting** Here we go—“Step 8: Take Action.” You have prepared thoroughly and gathered the wisdom of all at the table. Now you’re ready to implement your action plan. Meet regularly to adjust, refine, pray, share new learnings, evaluate, and celebrate.

Work with *rather than merely* do for.

Before taking the first step

- 7 Keep anchored in your faith. Working for justice is not an add-on to your life but a central part of your Christian faith. During your justice journey, you will interpret the pain of the world through the lens of the gospel and respond accordingly.
- 7 Integrate Bible study and worship into all of your meetings. You may want to use *The Kingdom of God: A Reign of Justice* (see “Resources,” page 15). Consider publicizing your Bible study to attract others to your work.
- 7 Reflect on these questions: “How does what I am reading in the Bible relate to what I am seeing in the world and in this community?” “What does the Bible say about doing justice?” “What are some signs of injustice in our community?”
- 7 Enlist others to walk with you on this journey. Look for those who share compassionate concerns about the vulnerable people among us. Involve members of your women’s unit, social ministry committee, or youth group. Invite your pastor and leaders from other community churches.



STEP 1: Get firsthand experience

The success of your journey toward justice depends on your seeking the expertise of women who have experienced poverty or other types of injustice. *Working with* them rather than merely *doing for* them affirms their dignity. Most will be pleased for the opportunity to be heard. They will be able to give unique insights into what vulnerable people really need and want, as well as teach humility and courage. Listen and learn. Here are some ways to begin:

- 7 Volunteer to work in shelters, food pantries, legal assistance offices, community health clinics, abuse shelters, community organizing agencies, schools, the county hospital, senior citizen agencies, unemployment offices, and refugee service agencies and with other groups that respond to people who are vulnerable.
- 7 Make a special effort to involve those congregation members who have firsthand experience with injustice or economic hardship. Ask for their help and advice.
- 7 Reach out to unchurched vulnerable and marginalized people in your community, welcoming them to your congregation. Use the Women of the ELCA resource *Welcoming the Stranger: A Hospitality Workshop* in your congregation.

For reflection

With your initial core planning group, begin to identify some of the issues that seem to be emerging from what you have learned so far.

How does what you have heard connect with what the gospel commands us to do? Are you beginning to see some possible ways of responding?

STEP 2: Prepare for new partners at the table



You will be involving women who have firsthand experience on your justice journey. Consider these tips:

- 7 Before your first official meeting, talk about assumptions and stereotypes that both groups may have.
- 7 Arrange for transportation, child care, and other needs that will make it easier for all to participate. Create a safe environment without fear of reprisal from inside or outside the group. Respect confidentiality.
- 7 Encourage everyone's participation. If someone is not actively participating, try to find out what might be stifling that person's contributions.
- 7 Avoid terminology, acronyms, and lingo that others may not be familiar with.
- 7 Avoid making people feel "on display" by always directing comments or questions to them.
- 7 Listen without judgment. Be patient if someone has difficulty expressing herself. Do not interpret for her; instead, ask for clarity.
- 7 Establish several ways of maintaining contact with each other (phone, mail, through a family member or friend) because personal circumstances may change without notice.
- 7 When planning events or activities, keep in mind the limited financial resources of some members of the group. Look for underwriters or sponsors for such events.

For reflection

Why is it important to seek the expertise of women who have experienced poverty or other types of injustice?

Does enlisting others to walk with you in this justice journey make it easier, more difficult, or both?

Be with us

Help us discover our own riches; don't judge us poor because we lack what you have.

Help us discover our chains; don't judge us slaves by the type of shackles you wear.

Be patient with us as people; don't judge us backward simply because we don't follow your stride.

Be patient with our pace; don't judge us lazy simply because we can't follow your tempo.

Be patient with our symbols; don't judge us ignorant because we can't read your signs.

Be with us and proclaim the richness of your life which you can share with us.

Be with us and be open to what we can give.

Be with us as a companion who walks with us—neither behind nor in front—in our search for life and ultimately for God.

These words of a Latin American bishop were quoted by Henri J. M. Nouwen in his 1983 book, *Gracias!*

STEP 3: Find assets within your community

In every community there are valuable human and physical assets. As you look at your community, identify resources as well as challenges:

- 7 What institutions (hospitals, schools, churches, businesses) could be enlisted as allies?
- 7 Look carefully through local newspapers and listen to radio and television announcements. Who appear to be community activists? Which public officials and business leaders might be supportive? What issues affecting women and children are most often mentioned?
- 7 Talk with police officers, school officials, welfare officials, representatives of social service agencies, and others who have a perspective on community issues. What community assets can they identify? What do they see as major issues?



For reflection


What might a community based on justice look like?

What is God's vision for our community? For our world?

In every community there are valuable human and physical assets.



STEP 4: Identify issues and look for causes



Keeping in mind the results of your community assessment, begin to identify key issues that affect vulnerable women, children, and families. Is it lack of affordable housing? Inadequate day care? Violence? Racism? Substandard education? Inadequate health care? Environmental destruction? As a group, make a list of the most critical issues.

To move beyond a “Band-Aid approach” to justice, look at the underlying causes of the problem. For example, if homelessness is an issue, is it because of a lack of affordable housing in your community? Or might it have something to do with decreasing job opportunities in the area?

Divide your group according to the number of critical issues you have identified. If your group is small (fewer than six people), don’t tackle more than two issues. Ask each subgroup to look for the underlying causes of the particular problem it has chosen. For example, if the plight of migrant farm workers is an issue in your community, your research might uncover facts about lack of employment benefits, the impact of racism, the risks of the occupation, and the unfair labor practices of employers.

Gather as much information as possible, not only from within your community but from other sources as well—newspapers, videotapes, the Web. Check your local library and telephone directory for organizations that deal with your specific issue.

Do some firsthand research. Visit the migrant community, the low-income housing project, the prison or schools.

Remember to listen to the people most affected by these issues. They are the experts on the barriers they face.

*Move beyond a “Band-Aid approach” to justice.
Look at the underlying causes.*



For reflection

What are the barriers that stand in the way of a strong and healthy community?

How might justice be served in the situations you have studied?

STEP 5: Select an issue

Using the information you've gathered about the critical issues in your community, select one or two that will become a priority for your group. Although all the issues are probably important, trying to respond to all would not be realistic or practical.



Consider these questions:

- 7 What is the potential for community involvement? Who else is working on this issue?
- 7 Does this issue require an urgent response?
- 7 Is this an issue of justice?
- 7 Can you reasonably expect to make a difference on this issue?
- 7 Would you be able to enlist support from your congregation in tackling this issue? For example, if your membership includes numerous educators and parents with young children, you may wish to consider issues related to education. If your membership includes attorneys, you may wish to consider legal issues such as immigration rights.
- 7 Is there high personal interest on the part of your core planning group in working on this issue?
- 7 What are the specific community assets that could be enlisted in addressing the issue?
- 7 What are some potential barriers to effective action on this issue? Who else has tried and failed?

Continue discussing possible issues until the group has come to consensus and all are comfortable.

For reflection

Spend time in prayer and reflection, asking for wisdom and strength to understand and follow God's will as you venture forth on your journey to justice.

STEP 6: Become advocates



As Christians we have a responsibility to be informed citizens. We need to understand and advocate for public policies that affect those who are most vulnerable. Not to become involved implies that we accept policies that may be harmful to those who are poor and vulnerable. Christians bring values and vision to the debates on community and national priorities.

To become an effective advocate:

- 7 Obtain copies of *Stand Up for Justice!* and *Called to Be Political* (see “Resources,” page 15). Discuss these with your group and incorporate any new ideas into your action plan.
- 7 Examine biblical models who advocated for justice for the poor, including Old Testament prophets such as Amos, a vigorous spokesperson for God’s justice (Amos 5:24), and Jesus, who advocated for the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11).
- 7 Emphasize that advocacy, although it involves the political arena, must always be nonpartisan. Concentrate solely on the facts of an issue, not on your opinions.
- 7 Make sure that you have done adequate research on your issue (see Step 4 above) and that you are clear about the facts.
- 7 Condense your research into a format that can be clearly and briefly articulated to others.
- 7 Contact the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (122 C Street NW, Suite 125, Washington, DC 20001; 202-783-7507; www.loga.org) for a list of resources on congregational advocacy.
- 7 Make a list of legislators from your area. Get to know them and the legislative committees on which they serve.

For reflection

Discuss how to involve your congregation in advocating for the rights of those who are most vulnerable in your community.

Read and pray over Proverbs 31:8–9: “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

STEP 7: Develop an action plan

Whatever your priority issue may be (affordable child care, adequate housing, job opportunities, high-quality education, domestic violence), begin by defining your goals. What concrete tasks would you like to accomplish during the next year? What do you want the end result to be? Remember that building new relationships is critical. When setting goals, don't try to do everything. Be specific and realistic.

Join together with other community organizations that share your concerns. Learn from their experience in mobilizing others for action.

Brainstorm to arrive at strategies for reaching each of your goals. Consider these activities:

- 7 Hold forums to educate others about your concerns.
- 7 Plan an “immersion” in an area of your community most affected by the issue you have selected. Share your experiences with your congregation.
- 7 Invite women to share their personal stories related to the issue you are addressing.
- 7 Keep your congregation informed through newsletters and bulletin inserts. Establish a parish phone tree or e-mail list for quick action on policies related to your issue.
- 7 Watch for news about the issue and be prepared to take action. Organize a letter-writing campaign regarding your issue.
- 7 Publicize the facts about your issue through letters to the newspaper editor and op-ed pieces.
- 7 Run for public office; seek seats on your local school board or city council, for example.
- 7 Seek anti-racism training. (For information on participating in an anti-racism workshop, contact Women of the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2428.)

(continued on next page)

Brainstorm to arrive at strategies for reaching your goals.

STEP 7: Develop an action plan (continued)



Prioritize the strategies you have identified based on what is realistic for your group.

Keep these questions in mind:

- 7 How is what you are doing consistent with the gospel? (Having a clear answer to this question will help when you are trying to involve your congregation.)
- 7 How will you educate your church and community about this issue?
- 7 How will you address the underlying cause of the problem?
- 7 How will women who are affected by the issue remain involved in your efforts?
- 7 How are you incorporating a “working with” rather than a “doing for” approach?
- 7 What resources are available to help you implement these strategies?

For each strategy, develop a list of tasks, decide who is responsible for each task, determine resources needed, and set a timeline. Be sure to build ongoing evaluation into your work.

Your planning sheet may look something like this:

Issue:			
Goal:			
Strategy:			
Task	Person(s) responsible	Resources needed	Date for completion
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

For reflection

Take time to review your action plan. Discuss how it answers the biblical call to do justice.

Pray for the people involved with you in this process. Pray for strength and wisdom for them as they help guide you on this justice journey.

STEP 8: Take action

In this justice journey, your actions emerge *after* Bible study, prayer, reflection, listening, research, and careful planning. Through these actions you serve as God's hands and feet in the world.

When you are ready to implement your action plan, hold a service of commitment. Contact the Women of the ELCA Resource Center for suggestions (800-638-3522, ext. 2737).

Be ready to revise your plans as you go. Don't be embarrassed to acknowledge that what you have undertaken is more complex than you realized. Perhaps it is taking more time than you expected or is requiring additional resources. Adjust your plans and timeline as needed.

As your action plan unfolds, share successes and obstacles with your group. Meet regularly to adjust, refine, pray, share new learnings, and evaluate.

*Actions emerge after Bible study, prayer, reflection,
listening, research, and careful planning.*

For reflection

Reflect on what it means to answer Jesus' call to follow.

Pray that through your actions you will serve as God's hands and feet in the world.
Ask God to help you.



When your feet get tired



The journey toward justice is long, but it can be an energizing part of your faith life. To provide sustenance throughout the journey:

- 7 Stay committed to ongoing spiritual growth through Bible study, worship, and prayer.
- 7 Remain clear that what you are doing flows from your faith.
- 7 Avoid “compassion fatigue” by cultivating new leaders and delegating responsibilities.
- 7 Although the changes that occur as a result of your work may seem small, it is the journey, not the destination, that is important. And God is able to bless your efforts far beyond your imagining.
- 7 Celebrate and have fun! Celebrate God’s unconditional love, the community you share with all who are oppressed, and the work that you are doing to bring about justice.

For reflection

Reflect on the gifts you are receiving along your justice journey. Be open to the possibility that you may grow in love for God, yourself, and others.

Pray that as you work to transform society, you may also be transformed to become more tolerant, inclusive, generous, and forgiving.

Resources

Women of the ELCA resources

Available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers
P.O. Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209
Phone: 800-328-4648
Fax: 800-772-7766
Web site: www.augsburgfortress.org

Called to Be Political: But I Don't Want To Be Political! is a two-hour program that offers a fascinating glimpse into the teachings of Martin Luther on the role of Christians in politics and explores how those teachings still speak to us today. Code 6-0001-6485-8.

Called to Ethical Decision Making: No Easy Answers, a two-hour workshop, explores the Lutheran ethical approach and the complexities involved in ethical decision making and offers workshop participants practical experience in ethical deliberation. Code 6-0001-6486-6.

“For the Healing of the World: Speak Out for Women” addresses barriers that stand in the way of justice and healing for women, children, and families and shows how we can be involved in breaking down those barriers. Code 6-0001-6491-2.

The Kingdom of God: A Reign of Justice is an in-depth Bible study that looks at how both the Old and New Testaments address the concept of the kingdom of God and how we are called to participate in this reign of justice. Part of the resource ***Journey to Justice: Traveling with Women and Children Living in Poverty***. Code 6-0000-9893-6.

Stand Up for Justice! provides practical ideas for becoming an advocate for women in the United States and around the world. Code 6-0001-6495-5.

Welcoming the Stranger: A Hospitality Workshop is designed to help the church family open its heart to people, especially to those marginalized by society. The resource includes biblical reflections on hospitality, experiential role plays, and possibilities for action. Code 6-0001-6365-7.

Other related resources

Even the Stones Will Cry Out for Justice is a flexible three- or five-session Bible study, adult forum, or one-day retreat that teaches congregations to reach out to and embrace people of all races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Code 6-0001-0761-7; \$4.95. Available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Inclusion: Making Room for Grace provides models and strategies for moving faith communities toward greater inclusion. Author Eric Law says that inclusion is a discipline of consciously extending the boundaries of our communities to embrace and affirm people of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Available in bookstores or on the Web.

The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community is a book for those who seek to dismantle racism, including institutional and systemic racism. Author Eric Law broadens the reader's understanding of social and organizational norms—what they aren't as well as what they could be. Available in bookstores or on the Web.





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Women of faith making a difference

Women ^{of the} ELCA 

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
8765 West Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4189

773-380-2730 • 800-638-3522, ext. 2730
Fax: 773-380-2419

E-mail: womnelca@elca.org
Web site: www.elca.org/wo/

