

# Climate, Energy, and Disaster

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*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it.*  
Psalm 24:1

*Christian concern for the environment is shaped by the Word of God  
spoken in creation, the Love of God hanging on a cross,  
the Breath of God daily renewing the face of the earth.*  
"Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice"  
ELCA Social Statement-Adopted August 1993<sup>1</sup>

Since the ELCA's social statement on creation care was adopted major changes have occurred in climate science, awareness of disasters, and energy usage. However, the statement's vision of acknowledging the goodness of God's creation and the responsibility of humanity for this creation still rings true. Additionally, so do the tasks it gives the church: awareness and education, imitation of God's care in life and action, being communities of moral deliberation, advocating for public policy, and supporting corporate social responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

All creation exists within and is affected by the climate and potentially by changes that impact that climate. As a result, the reality of climate change (misleadingly "global warming") has become widely accepted. Some still hesitate to use these terms and debate the role of human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, as it contributes to these changes. Yet as scientific evidence continues to grow, and stronger/more unpredictable weather events have struck communities, pragmatism is overcoming ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> Caring for Creation Social Statement:  
[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS.pdf?\\_ga=2.244784965.1992433018.1552255663-1099454176.1543511872](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EnvironmentSS.pdf?_ga=2.244784965.1992433018.1552255663-1099454176.1543511872)

<sup>2</sup> Practical resources for congregations and individuals to engage this work can be found at ELCA Caring for Creation: [www.elca.org/Resources/Caring-for-Creation](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Caring-for-Creation); Lutheran World Relief: <https://lwr.org/climate>

Climate change, its causes, and its attendant risks and dangers are now being addressed by many global entities including national governments,<sup>3</sup> international aid agencies, religious institutions, and even large energy companies. Forward-thinking actors see changes happening that cannot be adequately predicted and are accelerating. They realize the connections between energy policy, climate impacts, and disaster. Additionally, there is a growing understanding that while all creation will be impacted by changes in climate those most vulnerable will again bear a disproportionate burden.

Climate, energy, and disaster are connected. As such policy responses must also be connected. Disaster response cannot simply be about being better prepared for the next inevitable catastrophe but also must include sensible energy policy that reduces reliance of fossil fuels and encourages clean energy solutions. It also must address inequities in city planning and maintenance that put some, typically the poorest, at greater risk in disaster. Just policy also will include encouraging transit options that provide options for mobility and thinks critically of the impact to other species of development as well as how we utilize farm and rural landscapes.<sup>4</sup>

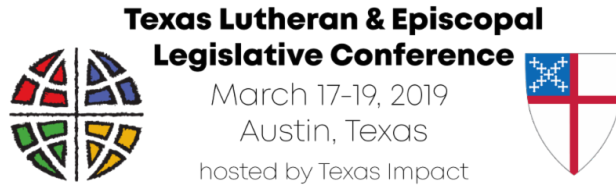
These legislative days are to be at the task of educating ourselves on current legislative possibilities that impact our communities and include climate, energy, and disaster. This is a large task but one we have been called to in our ELCA Social Statement. We are part of God's creation and as such are called to learn and to advocate on behalf of God's creation, on behalf of our neighbor, for just policy that can provide a hopeful and equitable future for all.

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<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Military along with many local and state governments have identified climate change and its impacts as a strategic problem. Lutheran World Federation made "Creation: Not For Sale" a sub-theme for its 2017 Reformation commemoration. [www.lutheranworld.org/climate-justice](http://www.lutheranworld.org/climate-justice); Pope Francis' second encyclical of his pontiff "Laudato Si'" relates to climate change and humanity's role in it. Exxon Mobil is an example of an energy giant addressing these realities as it will impact their business model and future profitability.

<https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/energy-and-environment/environmental-protection/climate-change>. For a comprehensive global survey of climate activity see the United Nations Climate Change website [www.unfccc.int](http://www.unfccc.int).

<sup>4</sup> Transit is also an issue of justice as it provides access for those without or who are unable to operate a motor vehicle to other possibilities of employment, health care, and education.



## Three ‘Easy’ Steps Toward Reconciliation

The Rt. Rev. Jeff W. Fisher  
Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas

In my travels throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, I am preaching, teaching, and leading worship at a different congregation each Sunday. At one church I was planning to visit, the priest in charge of the congregation asked me to teach Adult Sunday School when I came. She explained to me that they had been working through Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, exploring how the Body of Christ can live together in peace and reconciliation.

The priest invited me to teach this session of Sunday school, making this request of me: “In 45 minutes, can you teach us about how to live together in peace and reconciliation?” Uh-oh; that is a tall order, especially in 45 minutes!

However, I prayed about the subject. I reflected on my own life when I have experienced peace and reconciliation, and I came up with three “easy” (ha!) steps toward reconciliation:

1. Pay attention; open your eyes.
2. Listen, deeply, to another person’s story, in a one-on-one conversation.
3. Hand over power.

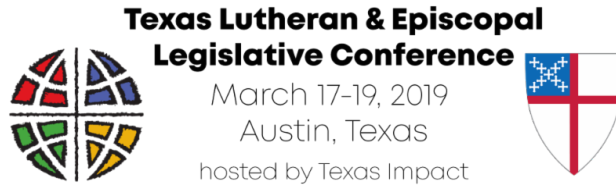
In step one: pay attention. Open your eyes to others. Notice details, with an eye to those who are historically marginalized or left out. Listen in a casual conversation and see if the first people to speak are white. Identify and point out “mansplaining” when you hear it. Look around the room and take note of where the people of color are sitting. Drive through the neighborhoods that you were taught are “unsafe.” Pay attention to what the youth are saying.

In step two: listen, deeply, to another person’s story, in a one-on-one conversation. In my leaning in to reconciliation work, I do understand the importance of grand and public statements by leadership, decrying injustice. I do understand the importance of lobbying and taking action for justice. Yet I am discovering in my own life, that when true reconciliation happens, it happens small. In my own life, I am reconciled to a sister or a brother, when we sit down

over coffee or a glass of wine, and when we invite the other: “Tell me your story.” Tell me your story about how you first learned about race. Tell me your story about when you first came out. Tell me your story of when you observed the power of privilege. Listen deeply to the other; then invite the other person to share their story as well. Jesus, who gives us the ministry of reconciliation, will be present in your conversation. Each of you will be changed and transformed.

And step three: hand over power. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings about the day to come, the day when “God will lift up the lowly; and cast down the mighty from their thrones.” In your context and community, what would it look like to cast down the mighty and to hand over power to the traditionally voiceless and powerless ones? What if you handed over a decision in your church to the youth, rather than to the elders? What if only people of color were given authority, in a reversal of white privilege? This step is a scary thing, because for centuries we have delivered power to the majority, to the loudest voices, and to those who have given the most money to our churches. Yet in his ministry, Jesus was continually transferring power and praise to the least of these.

So, there you have it. Three “quick and easy” steps toward peace and reconciliation! Reconciliation is a gift from Jesus Christ. Jesus has charged us to be ministers of reconciliation; let us receive this charge as a gift, a blessing, and a holy challenge.



## Reflections on the Church and Criminal Justice

Bishop Sue Briner  
Southwestern Texas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24*

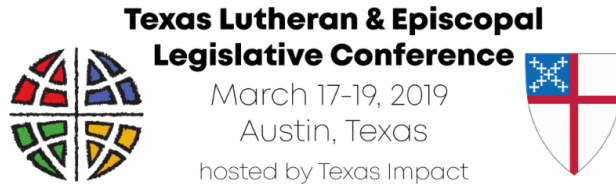
*[Jesus] stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:16b-19*

Incarceration in the United States is one of the main forms of punishment and rehabilitation for the commission of felony and other offenses. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, and the highest per-capita incarceration rate, according to World Prison Brief ([www.prisonstudies.org](http://www.prisonstudies.org)). In 2018 2.2 million Americans have been incarcerated, which means for every 100,000 there are 655 that are currently inmates. This represents a 500% increase in the past 40 years. Contributing factors to this include mandatory minimum sentences, "three strikes" laws, changes in policing and harsher sentences for non-violent drug offenses. These laws disproportionately affect African Americans; they are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites, and are much more likely to experience traffic stops, searches and juvenile arrests, and receive harsher sentences than those who are Caucasians. There is also disparity in the use of non-lethal force against both African Americans and Hispanics.

The 2013 [ELCA Social Statement on \*The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries\*](#) affirms the fundamental principles of the U.S. criminal justice system such as due process of the law and the presumption of legal innocence. At the same time, we recognize the current system's serious deficiencies, particularly as they relate to the implicit and explicit racism that permeates this and many systems in our country. In the 1993 ELCA Social Statement on [Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture](#), the ELCA teaches that racism is a sin, a violation of God's intention that fractures and fragments human society.

Part of our baptismal calling is to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. This means that we are called as persons of faith to be active participants in civil government, to vote and participate in civic discourse about the criminal justice system, and to advocate for justice and fairness for all people within the criminal justice system and beyond. We can do this through our support of [public officials](#) who prioritize sensible, rational and equitable approaches to

criminal justice and public policies that are just, effective and seek to overcome our history of racial disparity in all aspects of the criminal justice system.



# The Bible and Migration

Bishop Michael Rinehart

Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34*

The Bible speaks poignantly to migration. Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden. Abram is told to go from his country and kindred to a new land. Moses and the Israelites flee slavery in Egypt for a new life in a new land. The Israelites are told to remember, “A wandering Aramean was my father.” They are taught to be kind to the immigrant, “for you were once sojourners in the land of Egypt.” Jesus, Mary and Joseph seek asylum from Herod’s persecution into Egypt. The Bible story is the story of migration.

In the midst of the world’s story of migration, Jesus teaches kindness to strangers, one of the most selfless moral acts. Through the story of the Good Samaritan and the story of the Sheep and the Goats, Jesus proclaims love of the stranger. Antiquity is filled with stories of divine visitors coming to earth to see how they are treated by the faithful. In Matthew 24, the Son of Man comes on the clouds at the end of time, rewarding those who showed kindness to those in need. “...for when I was hungry you gave me food... when I was a stranger you welcomed me...” The surprise is this: When we encounter the stranger, we encounter Jesus himself.

In Lutheran theology, the government is the kingdom on the left. It has a right to organize into territories for the sake of order. It has a responsibility to protect people, and protect borders. But a country of people of faith cannot close its borders to those who are fleeing persecution, famine or disease. To do so it so turn away Jesus himself.

As [The ELCA Social Message on Immigration](#) says, our church has a history of hospitality to migrants and refugees. Following WWII, when one of every six Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced, Lutherans, with the help of 6,000 congregations resettled 57,000 refugees. In the decade after the fall of Saigon in 1975, Lutheran congregations resettled over 50,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. This church calls on our government to enact generous immigration policies, that offer hope, safety and freedom to the world, knowing that in exercising hospitality, we receive more than we give.

