

Volume Foreword

A Letter to the Church, from Kit Kleinhans

In identifying . . . aspects of society that require engagement, this church does not presume to have quick or easy solutions for the deeply rooted, intertwined, and complex problems that permeate earthly systems and structures. Time, study, effort, and discernment are required. (“Faith, Sexism, and Justice,” 60).¹

Dear Church,

I grew up in a Lutheran tradition that did not—and does not—allow women to serve as pastors. I remember one time when a male leader told me that if the church could make an exception for any woman, it

would be me. At first, I found that flattering, but I soon realized that being an “exceptional” individual did not change the fundamental problem, which was the church structure and culture that excluded women from leadership.

I am in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America now, and next year I will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of my ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. But my presence here doesn't mean there isn't any sexism in the ELCA. Neither does the fact that our presiding bishop and about half of our synod bishops are women. Sexism in the church continues to be manifested in many ways: access to calls, inequitable compensation, and how women in ministry are treated. (If you have any doubts, search online for “Seriously? Women in Ministry” to see a video produced by the North Carolina Synod of the ELCA.)

As the social statement “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action” (2019) says, “The ELCA recognizes that some progress has been made to address patriarchy and sexism and to reduce their effects; however, more effort is required. We believe that this church, together with many other partners, can identify and challenge the complexities of patriarchy and sexism

and advance equity. Gender-based equity happens through beliefs and ideas that are gender-just and through laws, policies, and practices that support an equitable common good—abundant life for all (50)”.

“Faith, Sexism, and Justice” calls all of us—lay and ordained—not just to think differently but to act differently. The 2019 vote to adopt this social statement was not the end of a process but the beginning of a commitment to work together for gender justice both in the church and in society. I encourage you to read and then take up some of the specific action steps identified in the social statement.

One of the strengths of “Faith, Sexism, and Justice” is that it makes a theological case, not just a sociological or political argument, for opposing sexism. This is a resource not only for those of us in the ELCA but also for our ecumenical partners and the global church. Between 2014 and 2018, I had the great privilege of leading a series of seminars on the Reformation and women’s empowerment for women from the global Lutheran communion. When they evaluated the seminars, many participants said, “When we talk about women’s rights at home, we are told that we are adopting Western values in place of the values of

our own cultures. Now when we go home, we can say that women's rights are not just Western values; they are Lutheran values!" To that I can only say, "Amen."

In Christ,

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Additional Dear Lutheran Letters can be found starting on page 115.

- To Girls and Women of the ELCA, from Jen De Leon
- To Lutheran Educators, from Kristin Johnston Largen
- To LGBTQIA+ Siblings, from Mary Elise Lowe
- To Men and Boys, from William Rodriguez
- To Rostered Leaders, from Brenda Smith