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**Voices for Justice**

**2022 Spring Program**

**April 30, 2022**

**NC SWO 2022 Spring Conference Gathering Program**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Good morning and welcome to our very first Hybrid In-Person and Virtual Spring Conference Gathering Program! It’s hard to believe it’s been over two years since we’ve held a Spring or Fall Conference Gathering, or any NC SWO event for that matter. There is so much that’s happened in those two years and we’ve got so much to unpack this morning.

Most of you know me, Lorri Monterose. I was one of the Conference Coordinators pre-COVID along with Tamarah Hefner, and I was re-elected at the Virtual Annual Gathering in November last year. This is my second time on the NC WELCA Board. I previously served as Conference Coordinator in 2012-2016. Joining me today is our new Conference Coordinator – newly elected Heidi Gibson – and I couldn’t be more excited to be partnering with Heidi! You may know her from one of the retreats she’s facilitated at both Kure Beach in the spring and the mountains in the fall

Now let’s started with our program, but I want to set the scene before we begin…

The last time we came together was at Committee Day II in January 2020. The Conference Leaders spent the day discussing our theme at the time – Stand For Justice! Make Change Happen! Little did we know just how pertinent this theme would become during the next two years… We scheduled dates for the upcoming 2020 Spring Conference Gatherings, the program on Social Justice was finalized and we were ready to Rock ‘N Roll! We also finalized the locations for the 2020 One Day Retreats in February 2020 since the Conference Leaders always provide Host Churches for the One Day Retreats each year. Looking back, the topic for the 2020 One Day Retreat was “Death and Dying” and again I say, little did we know just how pertinent this topic would become the following month when COVID became a global pandemic.

I bring both of these coincidences to your attention for two reasons. First, I don’t believe in coincidences, but I do believe in God working anonymously in our lives. Second, I truly believe that God was fore-arming us; He was giving us some of the tools that He knew we would need in the months, and yes what turned out to be years, ahead.

When the Conference Leaders met at Committee Day II in January 2020 to choose the Spring Program on the topic of Justice, we could not come to a consensus. The list of injustices in our world was so extensive, we couldn’t narrow it down to just one - human trafficking, sexual abuse, domestic violence, veterans, homelessness, racial justice, hunger, poverty, elder abuse, immigration reform, justice for women & children, environment, world peace, economic equality, school to prison pipeline for minorities, prison reform, social justice.

When looking at the big picture, we can get overwhelmed when trying to choose what we’re going to do to use our voice and stand for justice. And we can become paralyzed with fear that no matter what we do, we’re just one person – we can’t possibly be big enough, strong enough or smart enough to triumph over any of these giants of injustice that seem to be imbedded in our world.

Although we, as humans, may waiver in our conviction, God is clear on the topic of Justice. We read in Isaiah 61:81:

*For I, the Lord, love justice,*

*I hate robbery and iniquity,*

*In my faithfulness I will reward them*

*and make an everlasting covenant with them.*

We suffer for many reasons – our own mistakes, someone else’s mistakes, injustice. When we suffer for our own mistakes, we get what we deserve. But when we suffer because of others or because of injustice, this pleases God. God in his mercy says that he will reward those who suffer because of injustice. So, He will surely reward those who use their voice, stand up for justice, and make change happen.

Now, where do we begin to narrow down the list? We are going to take a deeper look into a few of the many injustices facing women today. Each participant received an electronic copy of the handout from the program with an extensive Resource List by topic to help you determine where and how you would like to be a ***Voice for Justice***. It’s far easier to serve God if we feel passionate about the work we’re doing.

There will be three parts to our program – Social/Racial Justice, Violence Against Women and Here I Am, Lord. At the end of each section, you will break into small groups for discussion.

Please continue to PART I - Social/Racial Justice

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**Voices for Justice**

2022 SPRING GATHERING
PROGRAM HANDOUT

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

**KEEPING THE FAITH — 1 Samuel 17:47-50**

1. We are all familiar with the story of David and Goliath as told in 1 Samuel Chapter 17. Have you ever stood up against a “Goliath” and triumphed?
2. When reviewing the list of injustices in our world today, where do you find the strength and courage to persevere when you are face-to-face with these giants?
3. What is one thing you took away from the stories Lorri shared today that you can implement in your daily life to use your ***Voice for Racial Justice***?

**PREPARING MY HEART TO BE A VOICE FOR JUSTICE — Matthew 25:31-46**

1. Are you a sheep or a goat? If what we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us, how well do your actions separate you from the "goats"?
2. What personally impacted you from the stories that Maxine has shared with us? What action steps can you take right now to be a ***Voice For Justice?***
3. What action steps can NC WELCA as an organization take right now to be a ***Voice For Justice*** when it comes to violence against indigenous women***?***

**CHOOSING YOUR PASSION — John 6:1-15 "Loaves & fishes"**

1. What would you say are the top three most pressing "physical needs" of our world today? Think on a global level. What are the top three most pressing "physical needs" of our country today? What are the top three most pressing "physical needs" of your local community today?

1. How do these “physical needs” of our world directly relate to the list of injustices listed at the start of this program?
2. Where is God tugging at your heart? Where are you personally being called to be a ***Voice For Justice?***

**BRINGING IT HOME — Reread the above scriptures**

When you go home, find a quiet place to reread today’s scriptures from I Samuel, Matthew and John. Then take a few minutes to meditate on what we’ve explored today, taking heart that we have been called by God to be a ***Voice For Justice***.

Review the Resource List that follows. Then take time to have a conversation with God. Remember that a conversation involves both talking and listening. Take the time to listen quietly for His direction by prayerfully considering where and how you are being called to be a ***Voice For Justice.***

Make a list of three Justice topics that are of particular interest to you. Under each topic, list one action step that you can take to further the cause you have chosen.

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**RESOURCE LIST**

**OPPORTUNITIES TO BE A VOICE FOR JUSTICE**

* **MISSING/MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN**
	+ **MMIW** [**mmiwusa.org**](http://www.amvetsm.org)

**Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women’s #1 mission is to** bring our missing home and help the families of the murdered cope and support them through the process of grief. Our broader goal is to eradicate this problem so that the future generations thrive. We are doing that through education of the threats that they face and self-defense. We just started a monthly program to do just that. It is called Staying Sacred and we educate and have self-defense lessons at every meeting. Our strength lies in the fact that every single one of the staff and volunteers have been assaulted or trafficked and our passion is to be the kind of organization that we needed growing up and beyond.

* **NIWRC** [**www.niwrc.org**](http://www.niwrc.org)

**National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center’s** Mission is to provide national leadership to end violence against American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian women by supporting culturally grounded, grassroots advocacy. NIWRC’s Vision is the restoration of sovereignty and safety for Native women.

* + **PODCAST – Red Justice Project** [**www.redjusticepodcast.com**](http://www.redjusticepodcast.com)

The mission of this podcast is to bring awareness to the many cases of missing and murdered indigenous people in North America, and the way we are erased in American media. We will also be highlighting the many political and social injustices faced by indigenous people. Crimes of continual cultural genocide and the resilience indigenous people have to endure for generations to come.

* **BOOKS**  [**www.amazon.com**](http://www.amazon.com)
	+ Will I See? by David A. Robertson
		- This book addresses the topic of violence against women with power and beauty. A story of tragedy and beauty illuminating the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.
	+ Missing Nimama by Melanie Florence (Nimama means Grandmother)
		- This is a touching story related from the point of an Indigenous Indian Woman as she watches her small daughter grow up without her grandmother (Nimama) experiencing important milestones - her first day at school, first dance, first date, wedding, first child from afar. Missing Nimama shows the human side of a tragic set of circumstances.
	+ If I Go Missing by Brianna Jonnie and two more
		- This book serves as a window into one of the unique dangers of being an Indigenous teen in Canada today. A fourteen-year-old wrote a letter to the Chief of Police  in Winnipeg where she called out the authorities for neglecting the immediately investigating Murdered Indigenous people and urged them to "not treat me as the Indian person that I am proud to be if she were reported missing .
* **SEX TRAFFICKING**
	+ **Lily Pad Haven** [**www.lilypad-haven.org**](http://www.lilypad-haven.org)

Lily Pad Haven is a nonprofit organization that provides housing for survivors of human trafficking. They have a network of safe houses which can each house up to two guests. Their guests are referred by Government and Non-government organizations that work with victims of human trafficking. Their mission is to provide transitional housing for survivors of human trafficking who need the comfort and protection of a healing, supportive environment to restore body, mind and spirit. They focus their efforts on providing an integrated system of care in collaboration with internal programs and community partners.

* + **Vigilante Truth** [**www.vigilantetruth.com**](http://www.vigilantetruth.com)

VT has a mission that is bold, simple and passionate - to end sex trafficking in the USA.  It is, therefore, a considerable part of their mission to revitalize the understanding of just how precious and valuable women are to our local communities and to society as a whole.  VT is determined to create an army of men, A Culture of Protectors, who seek to remove male predators from our streets, marketplaces, communities and yes, even our churches.

* **Youth4Abolition** [**www.youth4abolition.com**](http://www.youth4abolition.com)

More than 100,000 American children are exploited by sex traffickers each year. The average age that an American child is first exploited by sex traffickers is thirteen. Youth4Abolition™ (Y4A) is a way for this generation to get involved in preventing modern day slavery. We currently have chapters across North Carolina meeting monthly to learn about the problem of domestic minor sex trafficking and spread awareness to among their peers. This generation is the target of traffickers; this generation can be the voice that speaks out to end all forms of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

* **JUSTICE FOR WOMEN**
	+ **ELCA Resources**

[**www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women**](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women)

The Justice for Women program is shaped by the unique voices and experiences of a multitude of people across race, ethnicity, ability, class, sexuality and age. It is within this rich foundation that we work to tap into Lutheran theological roots to address sexism, connect this theology with specific issues in the world, and encourage people of all genders to work together. These priorities nourish the work and service of this church and our society.

* **ELCA Social Statement “Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Call To Action”**

[**www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Women-and-Justice**](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Women-and-Justice)

* **RACIAL JUSTICE**
	+ **Racial Justice – One Body, Many Members**

[**www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Racial-Justice-Ministries**](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Racial-Justice-Ministries)

We believe that Christ’s church is for all people. God calls each of us by name, and it is not our job to sort, divide, categorize or exclude. But as “saints and sinners,” we know and experience God’s work of healing and restoring as well as the persistent human pain and injustices of racism in the world. This is where God has put us, in the thick of life, where we participate in what God is doing by insisting on justice and upholding human dignity for the inclusion of all people in the life of the church and society. We are called to be a church that embraces each person and confronts racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual orientation, physical, personal and class barriers that often manifest themselves in unjust treatment, inequalities, exclusion and violence.

* + **Racial Justice Advocacy Network** [**http://www.ncwelca.org/Partners.html**](http://www.ncwelca.org/Partners.html)

NC SWO has several trained leaders to present this educational program promoting racial justice to your group. Call and find out how easy it is to set up a presentation for your group.

* + **ELCA Social Statement “Race, Ethnicity and Culture”**

[**www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-and-Culture**](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-and-Culture)

* **ECONOMIC JUSTICE**
	+ **ELCA World Hunger**

[**www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger**](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger)

More than 820 million people - that's about 11 percent of people in our world today - are hungry.
As members of the ELCA, we are called to respond. We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work. Working with and through our congregations, in the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Lutheran churches overseas and other partners, **ELCA World Hunger** is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need. From health clinics to microloans, water wells to animal husbandry, community meals to advocacy, your gifts to ELCA World Hunger make it possible for the ELCA to respond, supporting sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty.

* + **ELCA Good Gifts** [**https://goodgifts.elca.org/**](https://goodgifts.elca.org/)

ELCA Good Gifts are a creative, meaningful way to support the ministries of the ELCA that mean the most to you and your loved ones. These gifts are real examples from projects currently supported through ELCA churchwide ministries: the ELCA Fund for Leaders, ELCA Global Church Sponsorship, ELCA New Congregations, ELCA Vision for Mission, ELCA World Hunger, Disability Ministries and Lutheran Disaster Response. Each of these programs is a long-term, partnership-based ministry that focus on the needs identified by local congregations and global companion churches and their communities.

* **Lutheran Services Carolina** [**https://lscarolinas.net/**](https://lscarolinas.net/)

Established in 2012, LSC represents the coming together of two Carolina social ministry organizations – Lutheran Services for the Aging (LSA) and Lutheran Family Services of the Carolinas (LSF). The LSC umbrella encompasses various ministries – Serving our Seniors, Child & Family Services, Refugee & Immigrant Services and Disaster Response.

* **VETERANS**
	+ **AMVETS** [**www.amvets.org**](http://www.amvets.org)

**American Veterans, AMVETS, is the nation’s most inclusive Congressionally-chartered veterans service organization,** representing the interests of 20 million veterans. AMVETS is open to and fighting for all who honorably served in the United States military, including the Reserve and Guard. With more than 250,000 members nationwide, we are veterans serving veterans.

* + **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** [**www.nchv.org**](http://www.nchv.org)

NCHV will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers. NCHV is the resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers and local, state and federal agencies that provide emergency and supportive housing, food, health services, job training and placement assistance, legal aid and case management support for hundreds of thousands of homeless veterans each year. NCHV also serves as the primary liaison between the nation’s care providers, Congress and the Executive Branch agencies charged with helping them succeed in their work. NCHV's advocacy has strengthened and increased funding for virtually every federal homeless veteran assistance program in existence today.

* **Gary Sinise Foundation** [**www.garysinisefoundation.org**](http://www.garysinisefoundation.org)

GSF serves our nation by honoring our defenders, veterans, first responders, their families and those in need. They do this by creating and supporting unique programs designed to entertain, educate, inspire, strengthen, and build communities. In Gary Sinise’s words, “Freedom and security are precious gifts that we, as Americans, should never take for granted. We must do all we can to extend our hand in times of need to those who willingly sacrifice each day to provide that freedom and security. While we can never do enough to show gratitude to our nation's defenders, we can always do a little more.”

* **ENVIRONMENT**
	+ **ELCA “Caring for Creation Today”** [**www.elca.org/Environment**](http://www.elca.org/Environment)

Caring BE for God's creation is an ever-evolving topic in this world, especially with each new natural or human made disaster. As stewards of this world, we are called to care for the earth and examine our behaviors toward creation. While we need to take from the land for food and sustainability, we also need to be careful that we maintain good stewardship and do not exploit the wonderful things the earth provides.

* **Blessed Tomorrow** [**https://blessedtomorrow.org/**](https://blessedtomorrow.org/)

Blessed Tomorrow is a coalition of diverse religious partners working to advance climate solutions in faithful service to God. They do this by inspiring our communities to act on one of the greatest moral challenges of our era: climate change. Blessed Tomorrow is by people of faith, for people of faith, offering ideas, tools, and language that are familiar and compelling. Through Blessed Tomorrow, faith leaders work to reach 100% clean energy, prepare for a changing climate, and engage their communities, while maintaining the distinct voices of their traditions.

* **Activist Greta Thunberg** [**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta\_Thunberg**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg)

Thunberg's activism started after convincing her parents to adopt several lifestyle choices to reduce their own carbon footprint. In August 2018, at age 15, she started spending her school days outside the Swedish parliament to call for stronger action on climate change by holding up a sign reading *Skolstrejk för klimatet* (‘School strike for climate’). Soon, other students engaged in similar protests in their own communities. Together, they organized a school climate strike movement under the name *Fridays for Future*. After Thunberg addressed the [2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_United_Nations_Climate_Change_Conference), student strikes took place every week somewhere in the world. In 2019, there were multiple coordinated multi-city protests involving over a million students each. To avoid flying, Thunberg sailed to North America where she attended the [2019 UN Climate Action Summit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_Action_Summit_2019). Her speech there, in which she exclaimed "how dare you", was widely taken up by the press and incorporated into music.

* + **ELCA Social Statement “Caring For Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice”**

[**www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation**](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation)

* **IMMIGRATION**
	+ **Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services (LIRS)** [**www.lirs.org**](http://www.lirs.org)

LIRS’s Vision is – “All migrants and refugees are protected, embraced and empowered in a world of just and welcoming communities.” Their Mission is – “As a witness to God’s love for all people, we stand with and advocate for migrants and refugees, transforming communities through ministries of service and justice.” And their core values are - we are called to welcome those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the United States; we are committed to speaking out boldly and standing up for the just treatment of those we serve; we refuse to compromise our moral, economic, and political integrity as we carry out our mission to that end; we invite others to join our mission, eager to embrace fresh perspectives and explore new ways to engage in this work of welcome.

* **AMMPARO**

[**www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO**](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO)

The word “amparo” in Spanish means the protection of a living creature from suffering or damage. The ELCA’s strategy to Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) was envisioned after witnessing the plight of children who are forced to flee their communities because of complex and interrelated reasons, including chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement and lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Due to our connection to companion churches in the region, including companion synod relationships, and existing ministries in the U.S., the ELCA is well-positioned to help ensure that these vulnerable children are protected.