



# My Neighbor is Not for Sale



**Lutheran  
Social Service**  
of Minnesota



*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14*

Thank you for engaging with us to learn about the issues of sexual exploitation and trafficking as a first step towards keeping all children safe from these crimes. Cherish All Children, a service of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, has been working with congregations to prevent child sexual exploitation since 2005. We believe churches have a responsibility to protect children from harm and to actively engage in this long-standing social justice issue.

Our vision is to raise healthy generations free from sexual exploitation. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and we want young people to know they are worthy of safe and healthy relationships. We want to equip the adults in young people's lives with the tools to have open, educated conversations with young people about their safety in online and in-person relationships. Youth need our support more than ever, so whether you interact with young people at your church, in your profession or volunteerism, as a parent or grandparent – you can make a difference.

Faith communities are powerful agents for social change. Combating this issue requires the entire community. Partnering with organizations that have the expertise in trauma-informed care allows professionals to do their important work while we identify the appropriate ways to support them. Creating a welcoming and informed environment in our places of worship provides a critical support network for children and youth. And engaging in work to address the root causes of sexual exploitation – such as poverty, homelessness, gender inequality, racism, and the demand for sex – is key to prevention.

Thank you for taking the first step to protect and cherish all God's children. We hope this resource is just the beginning of your engagement with Cherish All Children and others working to end all forms of sexual exploitation.

**Joy McElroy, Program Manager**

Cherish All Children



## LEADER'S INFORMATION

Thank you for entering into this important topic of preventing child sexual exploitation and trafficking. Your leadership in using this guide will help your faith community become educated about the issue in order to identify ways we can all make a difference in raising generations free from exploitation. Cherish All Children is available to help at any point throughout your journey. Reach out with questions, for support, or to identify next steps after completing the guide.

### TO BEGIN:

1. Read through all sessions of the discussion guide, view the videos, and determine which handouts and additional resources you'd like to have copied for your group. It is impossible to cover the entirety of this topic in just four 1-hour sessions, so the guide is written to introduce four key areas, along with Biblical perspectives to reflect on. Reading the complete guide will also prepare you to respond to questions that may be better saved for a future session that addresses the question, or to contact Cherish All Children in advance with your own questions.
2. Decide whether you will print out copies of the guide for all attendees or order them from Cherish All Children for a nominal fee.
3. WiFi is needed in the sessions to view the videos and links provided. Videos could be downloaded to a computer in advance if WiFi is not available.
4. Prepare for the potential of an individual in the training disclosing a personal situation of abuse, exploitation, or other trauma to you or another person.
  - This may be something that happened in the past that they are now ready to talk through with you or another professional.
  - They may or may not have received professional support at that time.
  - Or, it could be a current situation of their own or someone they know or love.

At the start of sessions 1 & 2, we have a statement to be read encouraging people to take care of themselves as needed, and to reach out to the person designated for support or to be referred to another professional if they choose. The person designated for support may or may not be the pastor, depending on your context. In advance of the sessions, identify local professional resources you can refer individuals to. These may include a local domestic abuse or sexual violence center, crisis hotline, or the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. Session II of this guide introduces you to resources to learn more about trauma and what faith communities can do to support individuals in their healing process.
5. You may wish to have Bibles available as all texts are not written out in full in the Biblical perspectives section. Think through how you would like to lead this part of each session, reading in advance and discussing as a group Bible study, or led by the pastor, or another method that works for your group.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION RELATED SESSION I: WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING?

For this session, we use some videos that are linked in the guide, so you'll need an internet connection, computer, projector, and screen.

- Love146 videos are excellent resources for both adults and youth.
- ***The Life Story*** videos share real-life stories of the realities of girl's and women's entry into exploitation – poverty, violence, discrimination, and system failure – to explore solutions and larger system change. We'll view just one of the videos in this series, so there's opportunity for further learning at [www.thelifestory.org](http://www.thelifestory.org). While this particular project focuses on the stories of girls and women, we know all genders and gender-identities experience exploitation and trafficking. It is important to recognize and name this reality as well.

This session lays the foundation for learning about this issue, but each session can be independent of the others. If someone cannot make it to one session, they can participate fully in those they are able to attend.

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## WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING?

Thank you for being here today, to learn about this important topic of keeping children and youth safe from sexual exploitation and trafficking. While we may wish to push this to the back of our minds and not think of the traumatic reality some young people face, becoming educated IS a key first step in prevention.

While we go through this series, it is important for you to take care of yourself as needed. If you need to take a break from the room or get up to walk around, please do so. If you have experienced trauma and need someone to talk to, please see the person we've designated who can talk with you or refer you to a professional for support.

To get started, let's begin with learning some of the terms we will be using, and some of the terms we will not be using, although you may hear them used in wider society. We encourage you to share your new knowledge with others.

### TERMS TO KNOW

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)** occurs when someone exchanges sex for anything of value or a promise of something of value such as money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, or higher status in a gang or group. Another person may or may not be involved in arranging this exchange.

CSEC includes online child sexual abuse material (child pornography), child sex trafficking, child sex tourism, and child marriage when payment is exchanged.

**Sexually Exploited Youth (SEY)** is defined by Minnesota Safe Harbor law as someone under the age of 18 who has engaged, agreed to engage, or was forced into sexual conduct in return for anything of value. This includes survival sex, exotic dancing, and being filmed doing sexual acts. Safe Harbor laws are discussed more in Session 2.

#### **Term NOT to use:** ~~Child prostitute~~

This term implies some level of choice and carries negative stereotypes rather than referring to a child who has been a victim of a crime.

**Survival Sex** is when a person exchanges a sexual act to meet their basic needs such as a place to sleep, food, diapers, drugs, or transportation.

**Sex Trafficking** is a crime that involves compelling a person to engage in a commercial sex act by using force, fraud, or coercion in return for payment to the trafficker. If the person induced to perform the act is under 18 years old, force, fraud or coercion do not need to be present.

- **Force** may include physical restraint, beatings, rape, confinement.
- **Fraud** may include false promises, lying, tricking, withholding wages.
- **Coercion** involves threats and blackmail.

**Trafficker** – the person or persons luring victims into labor or sex trafficking and then profiting from this crime.

**Term NOT to use:** Pimp

This term has been glamorized through music, video, and social media. Changing the language we use is one step towards changing the culture.

**Buyer/Sex Buyer** – the person who is engaging in the criminal act of paying for an illegal sexual act with another person.

**Term NOT to use:** John

Using a common male name normalizes this criminal act.

**Grooming** – the process an exploiter or trafficker uses to win a person's trust and even love, to control and manipulate them into a false relationship to sexually exploit them.

## VIDEOS

We'll watch a 5-minute video by the national organization Love 146 to learn some quick facts and dispel some myths about child trafficking. Then, we'll listen to survivors share their own experiences and invite us into working for larger system change to end exploitation.

[30 Second Facts About Child Trafficking - Love146](#)

### ***The Life Story: Intro, and Entry Into the Life***

*The Life Story* shares the voices of survivors of sexual exploitation. It reveals opportunities we all have to step in and address root causes of poverty, violence, discrimination, system failures – inviting us to explore changes that help to create a better world.

We will see that exploitation and trafficking cuts across all economic classes, races, and cultures. It includes girls, boys, and non-binary youth – anyone who can be vulnerable to the lies and manipulations of a trafficker. *The Life Story* highlights women and girls as that was their particular focus, but it is important to recognize and name that exploitation and trafficking happens to all genders.

- View both the intro <https://thelifestory.org/> (2 minutes) and the segment [Entry Into the Life](#) (7 minutes)

WHO CAN SHIFT THE SYSTEM?<sup>1</sup> Each one of us. Girls and women enter (the life) through a series of small, cumulative steps. There are moments when each one of us can impact harmful systems. There are opportunities for people to step in and shift the pathway, to support an individual. Breaking free can be extremely challenging. But each social system encountered can be an important moment for survivors to experience compassion and access the resources necessary to begin a new chapter in their lives.

- Additional segments may be watched for further study and action, especially for those involved in the fields highlighted, such as education, housing, public health, economic and racial justice, mental health and addiction services, and many more.

### **Small group discussion questions after watching the video:**

1. What stood out to you about the stories of the survivors in the video?
2. What vulnerabilities do you think may have been present in these individuals' lives, and how were those used to exploit them? What are ways healthy adults could step in to support youth in their vulnerabilities?

## FOUR STEPS TO GET STARTED WITH PREVENTION

### 1) Know what child sex trafficking and sexual exploitation are.

- Sexual exploitation happens when anything of value or a promise of value (like money, drugs, food, a place to stay, rent, or higher status in a gang or group) is given to another person in exchange for any type of sex.
- This includes involving minors in pornography, strip clubs, exotic dancing, and threatening to or sharing sexually explicit photos or videos.
- Trafficking may involve a third party, not the sex buyer or the victim, who facilitates and profits from the exploitation. However, any child under 18 who is involved in a commercial sex act is legally a victim of trafficking regardless of whether there is a third party involved.

Safe Harbor, Minnesota Department of Health, [www.health.mn.gov/safeharbor](http://www.health.mn.gov/safeharbor)

Young people are inherently vulnerable, and those who seek to exploit or traffic a young person are experts at finding these vulnerabilities which leave a void in youth. Exploiters fill these voids with lies and deception, including promises of love, safety and care. This can happen in person or through online recruitment, and often happens over time in order to build trust. Oftentimes a youth does not even know they are being exploited. A need is being met, a void is being fulfilled, and then they may find themselves in a dangerous situation they cannot see a way out of.

Adults can take steps to fill these voids leaving youth less vulnerable to a potential exploiter.

“I think mentors are very important for teenage girls [boys and non-binary youth]. Someone who can listen and help them establish healthy boundaries and learn to trust the right people.”<sup>2</sup> –Andrea, Survivor and Advocate

### 2) Learn to identify vulnerabilities – things that can increase the risk of sexual exploitation and make it easier for someone to manipulate another; and work to increase protective factors – behaviors or conditions that reduce the risks.

#### Some vulnerabilities include:

- Youth wanting to fit in, low self-esteem, loneliness, being naive or too trusting, having few or no friends, difficulties with home life, depression or other mental health issues, having a disability.
- History of sexual abuse, poverty, experiencing homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse of family members or self, involvement in the child welfare or foster care systems.
- LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, & People of Color) Youth experience greater vulnerabilities due to discrimination, bullying, systems of oppression, and generational trauma.

#### Protective factors may include:

- Connection with a safe and caring adult, affiliation with pro-social peers, community support, emotional health, connection/commitment to school, access to mental health and substance abuse services, connection with faith community and supportive adults.



Some things to watch out for may include the following, although it's important to recognize that some of these can also be signs of youth going through normal changes in their development. Most important is to keep communication lines open, share your concerns and offer support.

- Youth develops a relationship online or in person with an older partner and may be secretive about them.
- Sudden change in clothes or expensive gifts such as jewelry or new phone.
- Loss of interest in school and/or favorite activities.
- Distancing from friends.
- Signs of physical abuse or evidence of being controlled.
- Fear, depression, or other unexplained changes in behavior.

**An exploiter or trafficker will often:**

- Look for a vulnerability that can be used to build trust with a young person.
- Bond through extreme emotional highs (love & praise).
- Purchase gifts and take the youth to parties with drugs & alcohol.
- Separate a young person from friends and family.
- Control cell phone use, excessively text, DM and track the youth.
- Instill dependency and obedience through fear and threats.
- Manipulate through feelings of guilt, shame and unworthiness.

**3) Don't be afraid to talk about it.**

Increase your awareness and if you see something – say something. Be aware of your own biases as well, asking yourself – would I be concerned if this person was from the dominant race or presented as a cisgender boy or girl?

**Youth:** Talk with a trusted adult such as a parent or guardian, school counselor, police officer, youth leader, or other trusted adult if you're concerned about your own or another's safety in an online or in person relationship.

**Adults:** Talk to the young person you're concerned about and offer your unconditional love and support, and talk with a professional to share your concerns and learn next steps if needed.

- Resources for support, to report a tip, or to get help:
  - [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](https://www.missingkids.org) (missingkids.org), 1-800-THE-LOST
  - [Home | National Human Trafficking Hotline](https://www.humantraffickinghotline.org), 1-888-373-7888
  - BeFree text line, Text "Help" to BeFree (233733)

**4) Take action now.**

- PRAY for all children's safety. Join our weekly e-prayer list and find more resources on our website to become further educated in prevention.
- Help shift the narrative in society – this is not a choice; these children and youth are victims of a crime and need our unconditional and nonjudgmental support.
- SPEAK UP when women, girls and non-binary individuals are being disrespected and when boys and men are being held to harmful gender stereotypes of "manhood". Help raise a generation of young people working toward inclusion for all.
- Talk to your children about personal safety and your family values – including online safety and online child sexual abuse material (pornography).
- Check out what your local schools are teaching about healthy relationships and sexual violence. Ask teachers and coaches to be true role models and partners in raising healthy youth.

—  **MESSAGE OF HOPE**  —

*If every adult can protect just one child, they will forever change one life.*

*If we can all change one life,  
together we will make a difference in this generation of children.*

From *Safeguarding God's Children* training materials

<sup>1</sup> [TLS\\_Handouts\\_TheLife.pdf](#) (thelifestory.org)

<sup>2</sup> Andrea, The Life Story. Retrieved from [thelifestory.org](#)

## HOW DOES THE BIBLE INFORM OUR RESPONSE AS CHRISTIANS?

Diane L. Jacobson  
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**Genesis 16:** <sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, <sup>2</sup> and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. <sup>4</sup> He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt (*made little*) on her mistress. <sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong (violence) done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace (*to your bosom*), and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly (oppress, do violence to, rape) with her, and she ran away from her.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found her by a spring (eye) of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." <sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." <sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." <sup>11</sup> And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Now (behold) you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael ("God hears"), for the LORD has given heed to (heard) your affliction.

<sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin."

<sup>13</sup> So she named the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi" (*God of my seeing*); for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" (*Am I indeed here seeing after I have seen?*) <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi ("*Well of the Living One who Sees Me*"); it lies between Kadesh and Bered. <sup>15</sup>

Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

<sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham.

**Genesis 21 (compare highlighting to Genesis 22:1-19):** <sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. <sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup> Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup> God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.

### ***We Are Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar: Biblical Sex Trafficking?***

Sex trafficking entails profiting from the sexual use and abuse of someone else. Very early in the Bible we find a story of sex trafficking by, of all people, Sarah and Abraham.

The Bible is a complicated book of faith. What we want is our heroes and heroines always to be good and noble and our villains to be evil. What we get are stories about very complicated people, stories that become mirrors so that we can see ourselves and our own sins more clearly.

Abraham, and by implication Sarah, are promised a child by God (Gen. 12; 15). Things don't work out because Sarah appears to be infertile, so they take things into their own hands. Sarah has an Egyptian slave by the name of Hagar. She tells Abraham to sleep with Hagar, and then the child will become Sarah's child. When pregnant Hagar looks with contempt on Sarah, Sarah, with Abraham's blessing, further abuses her until Hagar finally runs away into the wilderness. In the parallel story (Gen. 21), after both Hagar and Sarah give birth to their sons, Sarah casts Hagar and her child into the wilderness.

Many notable aspects of this story are found in the details, particularly in what is said and done. We see these details clearly when we look, in turn, at each of the four major characters: Sarah, Abraham, (the angel of) the LORD, and Hagar.

Neither Sarah nor Abraham see Hagar as a person, worthy of identity and respect.

Sarah embodies female complicity in her plotting, jealousy, and active enabling. She hands Hagar over to Abraham. She both blames God for her infertility and takes on the role of God by trying to solve the problem herself through trafficking Hagar. Ironically, Sarah speaks as if she is the object of rape, citing the "violence" done to her by her slave-girl. And then Sarah proceeds to actively abuse Hagar.

Abraham, for his part, is the subject of three important verbs. First, Abraham "listened" to the voice of Sarah, taking up her sex-trafficking scheme. Second, Abraham "went in to" Hagar. This non-descript, non-violent verb disguises the rape, the offence, the actual sexual assault. It is as though he does no evil. And third, Abraham speaks, "he said to" Sarah that her slave-girl is in her power, under her hand, giving Sarah permission to continue the violence.

The angel of the LORD or God directly is not without complicity in either this story or its companion. The angel tells Hagar to return and submit to abuse. The angel commits Ishmael to a life of conflict, contributing to a view of family systems wherein violence begets violence. And in Genesis 21, God instructs Abraham to listen to the voice of Sarah. But the major aspect of the divine role and voice moves beyond this complicity. The angel delivers the ancestral promise of offspring to, of all people, Hagar. And the words of the second part of this promise are all important:

"Now (behold) you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael (God hears), for the LORD has given heed to (heard) your affliction."

Not only do we hear words that will be spoken at the annunciation of Mary, but we also hear, in the naming of Ishmael, a clear foreshadowing of the God of Exodus. In Exodus 3:7, the Lord says,

"I have observed the misery (affliction) of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,..."

In response to this cry, God delivers his people, Israel, from their enslavement in Egypt. And so, the full force of this story of Hagar explodes in our hearing. Before the descendants of Sarah and Abraham are ever enslaved by the Egyptians, these same two enslave a poor Egyptian girl. And the same God who is revealed as savior in delivering the Israelites from Egypt gives heed to the suffering of this Egyptian slave-girl at the hands of her oppressors. In the companion story in Exodus 21, God hears her plaintiff cry, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And just as God opens the eyes of Abraham in response to his willingness to obey, showing him a ram caught in a thicket, so also God opens the eyes of Hagar, in response to her unwillingness to accept violence and death, showing her a well of water.

Throughout the story we now see the role of Hagar. We could make the mistake of seeing her only as victim and insignificant slave, off to the side. She begins in Genesis 16 as an object of talk who only has things done to her. But then, we are told, she conceives. As she prepares to give birth, her own character is birthed as well. She "makes little" of her mistress, and then she runs away. This run-away slave, like the later Israelites, flees to the wilderness. There she, like the people of Israel, receives the promise of God. And then Hagar does something remarkable. She does her own naming, not of the child, but of God. She

is the only person in all of Scripture to name God. She says, “You are El-roi”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” It is all about seeing the truth of what is in front of her. And for us as well, it is all about seeing.

The role that Hagar is given in the book of Genesis is quite astounding. She is given narrative space. This Egyptian slave has action and voice, and she has the sympathy of the reader. Hagar stands as a warning against sex trafficking, rape, and all forms of slavery. She insists that we look at her as a person, a full human being, who, in her presence, warns us against being blinded by privilege and promise. Hagar resists being defined by status or nationality. She stands before us as a significant child of the promise and a namer of God, central rather than peripheral. Significantly, her descendants, the Ishmaelites (who become the Muslims), are the very ones who, later in Genesis, save Joseph from death at the hands of his brothers and deliver him to Egypt. Hagar can help save us as well from delivering others to sentences of death and abuse if we have ears to hear her story and take heed.

### **Biblical Response Discussion Questions**

1. Now that you know about sex trafficking, does this forever change the Hagar story for you?
2. What challenges you most about relating this Biblical story to trafficking?
3. What do we learn from Hagar’s story that helps us to understand our own role in and reaction to vulnerable youth and sexual exploitation?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Lord, we come before you, weeping. Hear our prayers for children who suffer in silence or secrecy of all forms of sexual abuse and lead them to a safe adult who will listen and act on their behalf to end the injustice and support their healing. May all people work to end oppressive systems and create protective factors in our communities. Help us to be your instruments of love and safety, Amen.*

### **RESOURCES**

**Cherish All Children** [Cherish All Children | Lutheran Social Service of MN](http://CherishAllChildren.org) (lssmn.org)

**ELCA Justice and Social Issues** [Human Trafficking - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](http://HumanTrafficking.org) (elca.org)

**National Human Trafficking Resource Center** [Home | National Human Trafficking Hotline](http://Home.NationalHumanTraffickingHotline.org)

**National Center for Missing and Exploited Children** [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](http://NationalCenterforMissingandExploitedChildren.org) (missingkids.org)

**Polaris Project** [Home - Polaris](http://Home.Polaris.org) (polarisproject.org)

**Women of the ELCA** [Social Justice in Religion, Ending Trafficking | Women of the ELCA](http://SocialJusticeinReligion.org)

#### **For Parents and Kids:**

[NetSmartz Home](http://NetSmartz.org) (missingkids.org)

NetSmartz provides online safety activities for children and youth, making learning fun, both online and printable.

[Love146 - Ending Child Trafficking and Exploitation](http://Love146.org) Resources for youth and adults including interactive online segments with safety rules, warning signs, sexting, pornography, apps and websites to look out for, and what to do to stay safe.

## SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

Thank you for joining the second of four sessions to learn about the issue of sexual exploitation and trafficking of youth. As we discussed in the first session, this topic can be difficult, especially for those who have experienced trauma. It is important for each of us to take care of ourselves, so if you need to take a break from the room, please do so. If you need someone to talk to, please see the designated person who can talk with you or refer you to a specialist as you choose.

Today's topic introduces Safe Harbor Law, and the cultural shift this brings about for exploited youth and young adults. As people of faith, we can help to spread the message of treating all youth with dignity and respect, and offer safe, supportive, and non-judgmental places within our churches.

Victims are often left with feelings of shame, fear, and abandonment. They have experienced trauma, and often need the support of professionals who are trained in trauma-informed practices. Our role is not to "rescue", but to provide unconditional love and grace, meeting them where they are in their journey. It may be unlikely that a victim or survivor will ever reveal their experience within a congregation, but survivors are in our midst, looking for a place of healing and God's love. Our churches can be a beacon of refuge, aiding in the healing process. Unfortunately, faith communities can also do harm, when an individual's experience is not believed, or an individual is judged or blamed for their experience. This session is important to learn about the laws protecting and supporting survivors, and to become aware of the impact of trauma and be mindful about how the church can support healing for individuals and communities.

## SAFE HARBOR LAW

Safe Harbor Laws are put in place to prohibit the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for "prostitution" and instead, direct child and youth survivors to specialized services and care. These laws are in various stages throughout the country, providing an opportunity to get involved to ensure your state is progressing to support sexually exploited youth and young adults. In Minnesota, for example, the Safe Harbor Law:

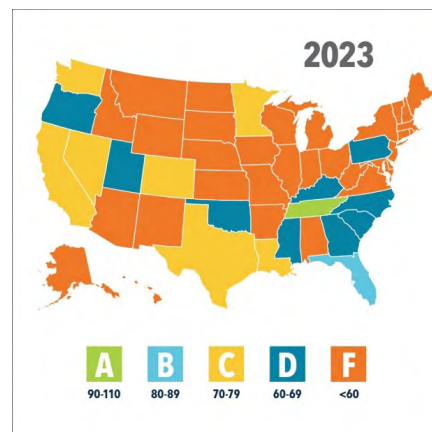
- Treats sexually exploited youth under age 18 as victims and survivors, rather than prosecuting them for prostitution.
- Added the definition of sexually exploited youth to Minnesota's child protection codes.
- Increased the penalties against commercial sex abusers or buyers.
- Provides funding for a service model called "No Wrong Door" to support services, housing and outreach that meet the needs of youth and young adults aged 24 and younger.
- Created and supports a victim-centered, statewide response for sexually exploited youth.

No Wrong Door is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and multi-state agency approach. It ensures communities across Minnesota have the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively identify sexually exploited youth and young adults along with preventative measures for those most vulnerable such as unhoused youth. A statewide network of victim-centered and trauma-informed services and safe housing are provided.

### Why is Safe Harbor Needed?

There is still a view by some that a person “chose” to go into this life, and victim-blaming occurs regularly in our society. But we know that vulnerable children, youth, and young adults are targeted by experienced exploiters, who use psychological manipulation, violence, and threats. A trafficker has preyed upon some vulnerability in this young person’s life, lured them in, with no real choice made by that young person. Once in “the life”, it is very difficult to get out. So even to assume that an adult engaged in prostitution is making a choice may be very harmful without knowing their full story.

- > To see how your state is doing, Shared Hope International has created Report Cards by state, annually grading states on their progress of enacting state laws on child sex trafficking. States are graded on areas such as: Criminal Provisions, Identification of and Response to Victims, Continuum of Care, Access to Justice for Trafficking Survivors, Criminal Justice Response, and Prevention and Training.
- > Check out your state’s grade [HERE](#).



## HOW WE, AS THE CHURCH, CAN RESPOND

### PREVENTION

Relationships with safe and caring adults who are positive role models can serve as a protective factor for youth. “Youth are more vulnerable to exploiters when they do not have anyone to talk to, or their emotional needs are unmet.”<sup>1</sup> The Minnesota Department of Health offers six actions to help protect children and youth, with more detail in their handout [A Parent’s Guide to Safe Harbor](#).

- Keep lines of communication open.
- Talk to your children about healthy relationships.
- Take an active interest in their social media life.
- Know your children’s friends.
- Talk honestly about sex.
- Educate your children about sexual exploitation and trafficking.

### Excerpt from the [ELCA Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation](#):<sup>2</sup>

“We attend to those who are exploited by caring for and empowering them, not by condemning and shunning them. We need to grasp how commercial sexual exploitation feeds upon global and domestic poverty, war, political and social turmoil, homelessness, child abuse and neglect, gender inequality and violence against women, racism, and related social ills against which this church has called for action, and to join with others to curb these ills.” (pg. 8)

### Excerpts from the [ELCA Social Message on Gender-Based Violence](#)<sup>3</sup>

“For too long the whole human community has ignored, minimized, covered up, rationalized and justified the destructive effects of gender-based violence. We also acknowledge how the Christian community, a body with bystanders, perpetrators and survivors, has participated in this failing. Too often the Christian community has given its tacit or explicit consent to this violence. In doing so, Christian communities have too often betrayed the sources of faith.” (pg. 9)

“Despite these failures, this church believes that God is at work to heal and to restore. Despite the misuses of Scripture and forgiveness, we will abandon neither. Every survivor is loved and cared for by God. God does not intend people to be hurt. God is with every victim. Scripture speaks of this, from God’s sorrow over Israel’s suffering to Jesus’ pain on the cross.” (pg. 11)

### Small group discussion questions:

1. How has learning about Safe Harbor changed or informed your view of victim/survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking?
2. Reflect on the excerpts from the ELCA social messages. How have we been complicit in this social evil? How will we join with others in action, especially regarding the root causes that feed exploitation?

## TRAUMA-INFORMED CONGREGATION

Being a survivor of sexual exploitation by its very nature can be traumatic. Survivors often need to work with specially trained medical, social service, legal, and mental health professionals in their healing journeys. In addition to physical and emotional wounds, there may also be a sense of spiritual injury. There is a growing awareness of the positive healing effects of life-affirming spirituality in community with others.

In its guide “Healing Congregations,” The Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation identifies six principles of trauma-informed care to create spaces of healing.<sup>4</sup> These draw from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) concept of a trauma informed organization as one that:

- **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands how trauma can affect individuals, families, communities, and even the congregation.
- **Recognizes** the signs of trauma and the practices of resilience and HOPE.
- **Responds** by actively practicing what we know brings healing and resilience in all areas of the congregation.
- **Resists re-traumatization** by applying relational healing modes and removing organizational practices that may interfere with healing or trigger painful memories.

The Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation, adds:

- **Repairs** relationships by acknowledging ways in which our faith communities have been sources of trauma through abuse, judgement, rejection and abasement and actively work to do justice and repair relationships.
- Trusts the power and wisdom of our scriptures and spiritual practices to cultivate **resilience** and well-being across all ages.

Building upon the inherent strengths of our churches through liturgy, music, art, ritual, movement, and community, we are called as people of faith not only to become increasingly aware of trauma but also to take steps to help prevent and heal its effects.



### **What Are We Called to Do within This Church?**

(from the [ELCA Social Message on Gender-Based Violence](#))

1. Recognize, name and root out the violence and its sources wherever it is happening.
2. Ensure care and create safe communities that foster healing.
3. Provide education.
4. Create accountability.

Read the detailed actions on pages 12-14.

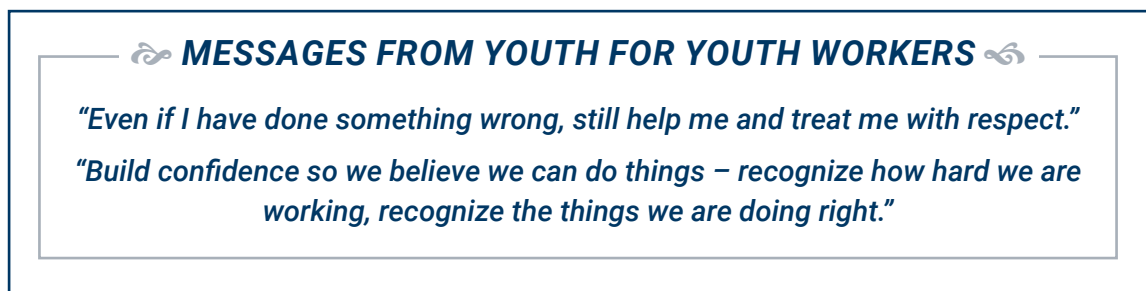
### **What Do We Seek and Advocate To Be Done in the Wider Society?**

1. Become allies with others.
2. Seek improved laws and social patterns.
3. Challenge organizations and agencies to adopt and use policies and practices that prevent and reduce gender-based violence.

Read the detailed actions on pages 15-16.

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What can you do in your daily life to continue the cultural shift to treating those who have been exploited as survivors rather than placing blame and stigma? How do we intentionally welcome all as whole and complete persons, not solely identified by their life experiences or trauma?
2. What next steps would you like to see for your church to become a trauma-responsive community?



*StreetWorks Greater Minnesota Focus Group Summary: Youth Experts and Service Professionals, February 2019*

<sup>1</sup> [A Parent's Guide to Safe Harbor](#) (state.mn.us)

<sup>2</sup> [Commercial Sexual Exploitation - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#) (elca.org)

<sup>3</sup> [Gender\\_Based\\_Violence\\_SM.pdf](#) (elca.org)

<sup>4</sup> [6x6: The 6 Rs and 6 Principles of Trauma Informed Care - Faith Health Transformation](#)

## HOW DOES THE BIBLE INFORM OUR RESPONSE AS CHRISTIANS?

Professor Karoline Lewis  
Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching  
Luther Seminary

When we think of Jesus' care of and attention to children, Jesus' invitation, "Let the children come to me," likely comes to mind. In both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, we find people bringing children to Jesus, likely for a blessing of some sort, which then the disciples attempt to interrupt and prevent. Jesus insists that these efforts not be stopped for it is to these children that God's kingdom rightly belongs (see Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17). In Luke, Jesus goes on to say, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

The literary setting of Jesus' interactions with children is important. In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus welcomes children within the context of conversation about marginalized persons in society. In the case of Matthew, Jesus answers questions about divorce, with clear compassion for the situation of the wife. A man should not be able to divorce his wife for any cause he chooses. With women primarily dependent on men for their livelihood, a divorce put a woman in a precarious, even dangerous and destitute position. Shamed and abandoned, she was left to rely on the mercy of her community. In Luke, Jesus has just told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. The self-righteousness of the Pharisee is contrasted with the humility of the tax-collector. The tax-collector, who would have been a despised member of society back then because he was charged with collecting taxes for a foreign power, the Roman Empire, is the one Jesus lifts up. As a result, when Jesus blesses the children, we need to interpret his concern for them against this wider backdrop of care for those whom society would overlook and determine undeserving of divine devotion.

The status of children in the ancient world did not share the same kind of regard that children typically have in today's culture. Children were valuable, to be sure, but utilitarian in many respects, as workers contributing to the well-being of the livelihood of the family and, if male, as necessary to carry on the family name. Jesus' attention to children, therefore, stands out – and stands out significantly. Furthermore, it is to children – to tax-collectors, to women, to those oppressed, to those enslaved, to those disregarded – that Jesus says the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God belongs. That is, they are full and valued members of God's kingdom. They are to be regarded and respected. The kingdom is not complete, does not come fully near, and is not completely realized, without their presence. With the references to the kingdom of God/heaven in these two passages, Jesus insists that these children are blessed and beloved. By recalling the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23), blessed are the poor and the persecuted; blessed are those who are hungry and those who thirst; blessed are those who are reviled and excluded – Jesus asserts that it is for these very children that the kingdom of heaven is near and here. In other words, God's kingdom comes up short, God's kingdom cannot be fully known, God's kingdom is not God's kingdom when any of God's children are not deemed created in God's image.

The disciples are called out for their inability to see that this is a moment where the Beatitudes might actually come true – and that they have a crucial role in making that happen. And so, when we do not recognize and live out our charge in caring for children caught in trafficking, we are much like those first disciples. God's kingdom cannot afford our oversight or our inaction when it comes to the children in our midst.

The Gospels are clear, Jesus is clear, that God's children need our vigilant attention and unconditional love. God's children need our commitment to their freedom so that they might flourish in God's abundant grace. God's children are deserving of our devotion not just to their well-being, but to their promise and potential of living into the people God has called them to be. When we come alongside our children in need, not only do we care for them, nurture them, and keep them safe, but we also embody the kingdom of God for all to witness and in which all can belong.

## Biblical Response Discussion Questions

1. Read Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17 again after reading Session 2, Safe Harbor: Support for Survivors. How do you experience these Bible passages differently after learning about the Safe Harbor Law?
2. How might you imagine that your support of victims of sex-trafficking is an act of discipleship?

### ✠ CLOSING PRAYER ✠

*Loving God, we pray today that you might empower us to be your presence in the lives of those who need to know you still love them. Help us to listen to the cries of those who need God's healing. Help us to see the un-seeable and to regard the overlooked. And embolden us to bring about your kingdom so that all of your children might experience your grace. Amen.*

## RESOURCES

### **The Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation**

[The Chicagoland Trauma Informed Congregations Network - Faith Health Transformation](#)

[Trauma and Resilience - Faith Health Transformation](#)

**Evangelical Lutheran Church of America** [Social Messages - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#)

**Minnesota Department of Health** [Safe Harbor Minnesota - MN Dept. of Health](#) (state.mn.us)

**Polaris Project** [Policy & Legislation - Polaris](#) (polarisproject.org)

**Shared Hope International** [Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking – State Action. National Change.](#) (sharedhope.org)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach | SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products](#)

Christy Gunter Sims, *Survivor Care: What Religious Professionals Need to Know about Healing Trauma* (Wesley's Foundry Books)

[Trauma survivors are in your congregation. How will you help them heal? A review of Christy Gunter Sim | The Christian Century](#)

Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, second Ed. (Westminster John Knox Press 2019)

## RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HEALTHY BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

This is our third of four sessions to learn about the issue of sexual exploitation and trafficking of youth, and how we can get involved to make a difference. This session exposes the role that male socialization plays in contributing to this issue and offers a challenge to change unhealthy and harmful social patterns. It offers the opportunity to call men in to “help create a world where all men and boys are loving and respectful and all women, girls, and those at the margins of the margins are valued and safe.”<sup>1</sup>

In our churches and faith communities, we can take an active role in opening these conversations with men and boys. We have too often shied away from what we perceive as difficult conversations in our churches and in our homes. It’s time for us to step into some discomfort, realizing the alternative of doing nothing causes much greater harm. This conversation is about cultivating a healthy culture, about engaging our youth, loving them through the mess of what society often portrays, and helping them to grow spiritually and emotionally into their God-given selves.

*We need to engage with our youth to pave the way for gender equity and safety for all.*

## CREATING RESPECTFUL CULTURE

A Call to Men is an international violence prevention organization that has worked with the NFL, NBA, MLB, the US military, colleges, high schools and other organizations to promote healthy, respectful masculinity. Watch the following video to hear how we can make a difference in raising the next generation of healthy boys and young men.

- [Tony Porter - A Call to Men](#) (11 minutes)

### Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What resonated most with you from what Tony Porter shared?
2. How have you experienced the “Man Box” in your life? Allow for the differing perspectives of those who identify as male, female, non-binary and all gender identities.

Another organization working to build safe communities free from violence against women and children is Men as Peacemakers, based in Duluth, Minnesota. “Men as Peacemakers believes that violence, including sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, can be prevented, and that change begins with the individual, who can then be engaged to help create change in their relationships, communities, and society.”<sup>2</sup>

They have a public awareness and education campaign to address the rising demand for commercial sex, called the “Don’t Buy It Project.” Watch this powerful public service announcement, “Don’t Buy It Project”, which shares many voices of how sexual exploitation is normalized in our society:

- [Don’t Buy It Project PSA- Official](#) (youtube.com) (2 minutes)

The primary objectives of the Don't Buy It Project include:

- Increase awareness among men about the prevalence of Commercial Sexual Exploitation in all its forms.
- Increase men's understanding of Commercial Sexual Exploitation as a form of oppression.
- Decrease social normalization of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, which is a primary prevention strategy to decrease the use of porn, strip clubs, and the purchase of sex.

The [Don't Buy It Project website](#) provides significant resources to support the movement to minimize demand for commercial sex, look at root causes, and work toward healthy masculinity. Commercial Sexual Exploitation disproportionately impacts people marginalized by race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, age, and other forms of oppression. Each one of us can commit to start seeing how our society objectifies and degrades those who may not conform to the norms that have been put upon them. We can work toward shifting values, beliefs and social norms so all can be safe.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

[Ten Simple Prevention Steps for Men](#) is a resource provided by the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), applicable across the country, to create communities that can thrive and grow. There are additional short videos and handouts for all found at [Rosemary Project - Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) (mncasa.org). A few prevention steps for all include:

- Powerful documentaries to help start discussions around masculinity, social influences on men, and survivors' experiences with sexual violence.
- Information about what it means to be an active bystander to look out for those around you and intervene in safe and healthy ways.
- How sports culture can use its power and influence to support healthy relationship skills for youth, and much more.

John Choi, Ramsey County Attorney in Minnesota, proclaims, "We need to have a really important conversation about how we're raising our boys. Men are at the core of this issue and need to be a part of the solution."

- Men – have meaningful conversations with other men in your life about your shared common values, the realities of sexual exploitation, and ask them not to participate.
- Adults, Parents, Grandparents – talk to the boys and men in your life about healthy, respectful relationships, and model this in your own relationships.
- Check out what your children's schools are teaching on sexual violence and healthy relationships – this is a health topic, and curriculum exists.
- Hold coaches, teachers, and others who have significant impact on young people's lives to a high standard. If something is not right – speak up!
- Open these conversations with your High School Youth Groups and Middle School Youth and start to make a difference in raising this next generation.

## HOW WE, AS THE CHURCH, COMMIT TO WORK FOR JUSTICE

At its 2019 Churchwide Assembly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted a social statement, [\*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action\*](#).

### Excerpts from the ELCA Social Statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*<sup>3</sup>

(Lutheran Social Service adds non-binary individuals to this statement, recognizing at the time of adoption, this was not included in the ELCA statement.)

“We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation flourish.” (pg. 2)

“Though God desires fullness of life and equity for everyone, as a church we recognize that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to sex (biological), gender, or both. In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality, (including American Indian and Alaska Native), religious identity, immigration status, sexuality, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied experiences, and education. This reality is known as intersectionality. This statement’s references to women and girls are intended to be inclusive of all people who identify as women or girls in the diversity of their individual and communal identities and expressions.” (pg.3)

“The far-reaching harm experienced by women and girls [and non-binary individuals] is rooted in a pattern of power, privilege, and prejudice, the key elements of any social system of oppression.” (pg. 4)

“Although men and boys often benefit from this social system, patriarchal structures and values also harm men and boys, including gay and transgender men. They are harmed when they are pressured to conform to narrow gender stereotypes or are unable to live out a false ideal of male superiority and control. People of all genders who do not conform to gender-based roles and stereotypes often are not seen or valued.” (pgs. 4-5)

“In faith, this church confesses that Christianity has been complicit in the sin of patriarchy and sexism through certain beliefs, practices, and aspects of its history. At the same time, we believe God provides resources within the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition to challenge the harmful beliefs and effects of patriarchy and to bring forth new ways of living.” (pg. 6)

Members are urged to recognize patriarchy and sexism as sinful and work toward systemic changes for all persons within church and society. By coming together in community to learn, deliberate, and assist in forming moral judgments on this social issue, we can work together to address harmful beliefs and practices.

1. How do we continue to perpetuate traditional gender roles and how might that play into destructive patterns or sexual violence?
2. How can you personally make a positive impact on the socialization of a boy or young man in your life?

## MESSAGE OF HOPE

*"I am definitely challenged to alter some of the language that I use with my players and boys. I will educate and challenge my male circles to do the same."*

From LiveRESPECT – Coaching Healthy and Respectful Manhood curriculum

- <sup>1</sup> A Call to Men – The Next Generation of Manhood, Vision Statement [Homepage - A Call to Men](#)
- <sup>2</sup> Men As Peacemakers, Join the Movement, DBIP Overview [Don't Buy it Project](#) (dontbuyitproject.org)
- <sup>3</sup> [Faith\\_Sexism\\_Justice\\_Social\\_Statement\\_Adopted.pdf](#) (elca.org)

### **How does the Bible inform our response as Christians?**

For the Biblical reflection in this session, spend additional time with the Social Statement [Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Call to Action](#).

From page 6, "The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures. We also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in the Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism. Some aspects of the Scriptures reflect the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm. A Lutheran reading of the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally."

There is also a study guide, video and discussion guide that can be used as a group or individually to engage further. Check out the 9-minute video "What do Lutherans say about...Gender Justice?" [Sexism - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#) (elca.org).

### **Biblical Response Discussion Questions**

1. What is challenging to you about what you learned in today's session?
2. Where do you see God at work as the ELCA declares patriarchy and sexism are sinful and pursues gender justice for neighbor and self?
3. What role can our church play in shaping a healthy culture for all genders?
4. What is one thing you can personally do?

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Liberating God, tend to the way of our hearts. Nurture the seeds of new life stirring in us, pushing through doubts and fears toward courage and love for all. We pray that our words and actions speak truth and help to shape a healthy culture for all genders. We pray for those who exploit others, that they may be held accountable for their actions and repent, turning their lives toward you and living fully with honor and respect for all. Bless all your beloved children, Amen.*

## **RESOURCES**

### **A Call to Men**

[Homepage - A Call to Men](#)

[Live Respect: Gender and racial equity curriculum for middle and high school boys - A Call to Men](#)

### **Don't Buy It Project**

[Don't Buy it Project](#) (dontbuyitproject.org)

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA Social Statement Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action)**

[Sexism - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#) (elca.org)

### **Men as Peacemakers**

[Men As Peacemakers](#)

[BEST Campus Institute – Men As Peacemakers](#)

### **Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault**

[Prevention - Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) (mncasa.org)

**Breaking Out of the “Man Box” – The Next Generation of Manhood**, Tony Porter, Skyhorse Publishing, 2021.

### **The Mask You Live In**

A powerful documentary by Academy Award-nominated director, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, explores the messages we give boys that lead them to disconnect from their emotions, objectify women, and resolve conflict with violence. It starts the conversation of how we can raise boys to have a healthy sense of their own masculinity and find solutions to help us raise a healthier generation of boys and young men. You can find this documentary on Netflix or Amazon and host a showing complete with discussion questions to debrief. Cherish All Children can support you in this effort.

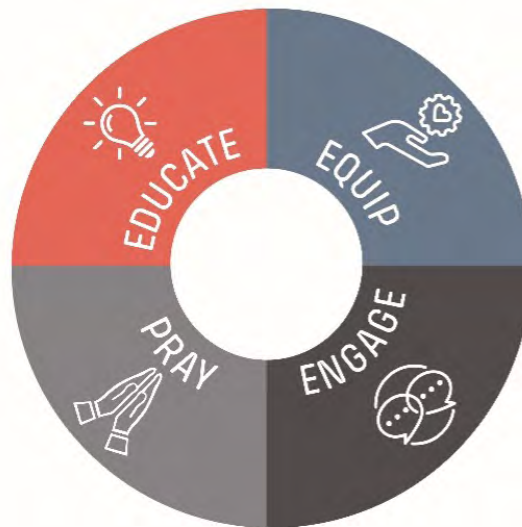


### USING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

While this is the final session in our series to learn about preventing sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and youth, it marks just the beginning of the work to be done. With this new knowledge, we hope you will be inspired to act, to get involved in the long-term fight against this injustice. The ELCA Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation states, “Love born of faith in Jesus Christ calls us all to attend to, discuss, resist, and reject the system of sexual exploitation.” <sup>1</sup>

We believe we are called as people of faith to work together on this issue, first by becoming educated and opening these conversations with adults and youth in our churches. This allows us to go forward together supporting young people in healthy ways, working in our own communities to shift cultural influences that put children at risk, and to act responsibly in the movement to end commercial sexual exploitation.

### HOW DO WE GET STARTED?



### EDUCATION

You have already begun! The first step is to become educated about the issue and learn how faith communities can get involved. We also learn what is best left for specially trained social service providers, health professionals, law enforcement, and others. Continue this education by providing opportunities for children, youth, parents, and all members to learn about child sexual exploitation and how to prevent it.

- Take this resource and spread it more widely throughout your congregation. Adult Forums, Women’s and Men’s Groups, Community Groups and more can be a part of the learning and discussion.
- Invite local partners in as a panel of experts to share the work being done in your community and how the church can support these efforts.
- Attend or host a community event to learn more about preventing exploitation. Social service providers, county attorneys, law enforcement, and others will often participate to share what is being done and how your group can get involved.

- Engage the young people in your lives and in your congregation in further education. Cherish All Children's [Safe and Healthy Relationships Youth Guide](#) is a four-session series for middle school and high school youth. Youth learn to identify healthy vs. unhealthy relationships both online and in person, engaging in activities, discussion and skill-building.
- There are many more [resources on our website](#) such as documentaries with discussion guides, books, and online resources for youth and parents.

## PRAYER

Cherish All Children offers many resources for your church to pray for the children and youth in your community.

- Pray each week, using our Wednesday e-prayer, which connects one of the upcoming Sunday lessons with a message and prayer to prevent exploitation. [View one of our Wednesday Prayers](#) and [sign up](#) to receive this resource.
- Begin a prayer ministry for children in your church. Some churches partner a child with an adult who will pray regularly for this child. Some pray in worship during the prayers of the people, to keep children safe from the harm of exploitation.
- [Prayers for Cherishing Children](#) booklets are available, which provide a collection of prayers for children, youth and young adults for each day of the month.
- [Lenten Prayers to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation](#) is another resource providing six weeks of prayer petitions to use during this season of the church.

## ENGAGE YOUTH IN ACTION

Support their healthy development and honor their desire to create positive changes in their world.

- Watch a film together and discuss how youth in your community experience these challenges in their lives, and what actions they might take to make a difference. *The Mask You Live In*, *MissRepresentation*, and *Screenagers*, are a few recommended documentaries with discussion guides available.
- Go to local events together that engage communities in prevention of exploitation and trafficking, such as races/walks, theater performances, university events. Engage your youth in Cherish All Children's annual hybrid 5K event!
- Volunteer with an anti-trafficking organization or an organization supporting youth experiencing homelessness or other risk factors that may lead to exploitation.
- Hold a fundraiser for Cherish All Children or for a local agency working on this issue or one supporting survivors.

## ENGAGE ADULTS IN ACTION

- Identify an individual or group who will act as point person(s) to keep your faith community moving forward with continued education, action steps, and activities. Some churches have a "Cherish All Children Team" and we can help you get started and continue to partner with you.
- Identify one area of this issue that is most significant to your community and dig further into that specific subject area. This could include training for youth, Session II on Support for Survivors, or Session III on Ending Demand and Raising Healthy Boys and Young Men.
- Use our [Education and Resources](#) to host a film-discussion event, book club, or other event to engage your community further.

- Seek out local events such as social media safety training, theater companies performing on this topic, trainings, conferences, races and walks.
- Attend Cherish All Children events hosted throughout the year and connect with other churches hosting events and activities. [Follow our Facebook page](#) for updates.
- Connect with organizations in your community that work to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation. Build relationships to support their prevention work or to support those who provide services to exploited youth. Check out our [directory of organizations providing services to youth](#) or use this model to create one for your community.
- **ACT** to address societal practices that exploit children and youth.
  - o **Be intentional** about how you live in community with others. **Speak up** when women, girls, boys, or LGBTQIA2S+ persons are being disrespected or when men are not holding other men accountable.
  - o Support public policies that address child sexual exploitation and trafficking, taking action to support critical legislation. See [www.PolarisProject.org](http://www.PolarisProject.org).
  - o Identify ways you can support raising the next generation of young people, to respect and value all, and work to dismantle systems of oppression.
- Financially support Cherish All Children and other local organizations working to prevent sexual exploitation and trafficking or those supporting survivors.

Congregations can choose to begin this journey in the way that best suits them. Some begin with prayer while others get involved in local actions right away. What's most important is that you do what you can to honor and cherish all God's children, preventing them from exploitation and helping them live to their full potential.

**MESSAGES OF HOPE**

*"I'm kind of a follower sometimes, and so when I see my friends doing something, I like to do it. Now I feel informed, and like, able to make my own decisions better to keep myself safe." ~8th grade Confirmation student*

*"Discussion with the parents was really helpful. It was just comforting, just having other adults there with kids the same age and we all shared the same concerns and we all came up with ways to talk to our kids about being safer." ~Parent of 8th grade student*

Student and parent after going through Safe and Healthy Relationships Youth Guide.

<sup>1</sup> [www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation)

**Small Group Discussion Questions:**

1. How does your congregation already extend care to children in the wider community? How could those efforts be expanded to include ideas from this study?
2. How might you engage the youth or young adults in your community to support one another in establishing healthy relationships?
3. In what way can you see your congregation engaging in prevention of child sexual exploitation in partnership with Cherish All Children?



## HOW DOES THE BIBLE INFORM OUR RESPONSE AS CHRISTIANS?

Bishop Patricia Lull &  
Anna Marsh  
Executive Administrator  
Saint Paul Area Synod, ELCA

If asked to think of a story of a child in the Bible many would name the infant Jesus, whose birth stories are told in Luke 1:26-2:20 and Matthew 1:18-2:18. In our Christmas carols and children's pageants we picture Jesus surrounded by loving parents, curious shepherds and gift-bearing magi. But in Matthew's account we also learn that the life of the child Jesus was at great risk. To protect his young life from King Herod's death threat, his parents had to flee with him to the country of Egypt. Even the life of Jesus raises the question – *What do we need to do to make sure all children are safe?*

It is sobering to learn about children in our own communities who are at risk of sexual exploitation. In our congregations, we are often reluctant to talk about social issues that remind us of the brokenness of our lives, such as our failure to protect all children. Deep patterns of human trafficking and sexual exploitation can seem too overwhelming to address when we gather for worship and learning.

As people of faith, we desire to align our lives and public actions with the testimony of the Bible and our theology as Christians. Yet when we read the Bible with children in mind, we find more stories about vulnerability than safekeeping, more threat than security. In the biblical world as in our own, children could be the victims of harsh economic and social realities.<sup>1</sup> Yet, we remain curious to discover what God has to say across the centuries about the value of children and our responsibility for protecting all children.

The Bible teaches us of the inherent dignity of all humans (Genesis 1:27) and commands care for the vulnerable of society (Deuteronomy 14:29). Both the Hebrew prophets and Jesus use powerful images of parental love to describe God's love for people (Hosea 11:3-4, Matthew 23:37).

In Exodus 20, Moses presents the Ten Commandments to the people. The fourth commandment is, "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." While this reminds us that parents deserve our honor and respect, as well as our care when they are elderly or frail, Luther's explanation of the fourth commandment also exhorts parents to fulfill their responsibility for loving care of children: "Do not imagine the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. It is a strict command and injunction of God, who holds you accountable for it."<sup>2</sup>

Luther writes elsewhere of a responsibility to care for all the children in a community. In 1524 he admonished the local government officials to establish schools for both boys and girls: Indeed, for what purpose do we older folks exist, other than to care for, instruct, and bring up...young people and to seek their best interests, when nature itself should drive us to do this and even the heathen afford us abundant examples of it.<sup>3</sup>

Why was Luther so insistent? He recognized that he was living in an age when a child's potential economic value could overshadow everything else in their lives. There was an attitude that only the most gifted children in affluent families needed to be educated; most children could be put to work within the household or in the community. This commercialized the value of a child just as human trafficking turns some children into commodities today.

In a sermon in 1530, Luther again addresses this topic:

[God] has not given you your children and the means to support them simply so that you may do with them as you please, or train them just to get ahead in the world. You have been earnestly commanded to raise them for God's service.<sup>4</sup>

Here, the reformer is not only talking about those who will grow up to be pastors or church workers. Luther advocated for a hardy understanding of our responsibility to be good citizens, serving God through the work of education, business, public service and the arts alongside the work of the church.

Mary and Joseph modeled what we are called to offer to all children in our communities – safety, respect and the opportunity to grow up unscarred by exploitation or violence. Believing that the life of every person matters to God – regardless of their age, skills or economic usefulness – can motivate our congregations to be actively engaged in caring for, protecting and cherishing all children. Rather than denying or ignoring the dangers that surround human trafficking, God gives us the will and the power to thwart all those who would hurt young lives.

We have an opportunity as individuals and as a church, to take an active role in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and youth. The ministry of Cherish All Children provides congregations with education and tools to engage in this work in your own community. Their prevention model begins with prayer and educating ourselves on this issue, and then moves us to connect with others engaged in fighting this injustice, acting to keep all God’s children safe.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Julie Faith Parker’s *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in Biblical Narrative* (2013) and Naomi Steinberg’s *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* (2013).

<sup>2</sup> LC 169 in Kolb and Wengert, 409.

<sup>3</sup> To the Councilmen of Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools (1524), in LW 45:353.

<sup>4</sup> A Sermon on Keeping Children in School (1530), in LW 46:222.

Additional Works Cited:

Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, Walther I. Brandt and Robert C. Schultz. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1955-

Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.

—  **CLOSING PRAYER**  —

*God of justice, stir in us a passion for service, that we reach out and do our part to support organizations committed to ending sexual exploitation. Whether big or small, may our actions come together to surround all your children, especially those who are vulnerable, victims or survivors, with the eternal hope of your love and grace. Amen.*

**RESOURCES**

**Cherish All Children**

[Cherish All Children | Lutheran Social Service of MN](http://lssmn.org) (lssmn.org)

[Info@cherishallchildren.org](mailto:Info@cherishallchildren.org)



### Joy McElroy

Program Manager  
Cherish All Children

Joy McElroy is the director of Cherish All Children, supporting the organization's transition into Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota in 2017. Prior to that, Joy was a Cherish All Children educator, engaging churches in the Saint Paul Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to prevent child sexual exploitation.

She has over 30 years of leadership experience in business, education and church organizations. Her life's work has focused on serving and raising up individuals, including a 10-year teaching position at the Promise Program for women seeking self-sufficiency, and creating, implementing, and leading an ELCA program "Youth Leadership in the City." She is dedicated to social justice issues, especially those impacting women, children, and youth.

Joy holds a master's degree in human resources from the University of Minnesota, with a focus on training and development. She lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota with her family, attending Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill where she is active supporting many youth and community activities.



### Diane Jacobson

Professor Emerita of Old Testament and Retired Director  
of the Book of Faith Initiative for ELCA  
Luther Seminary

Dr. Diane Jacobson is professor emerita of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, MN where she taught from 1982-2010. She also served as director of the Book of Faith Initiative for the ELCA from 2008-2015. Diane has been a frequent speaker throughout the Church, including the 2011 and 2013 Churchwide Assemblies, the Lutheran World Federation 50th Anniversary Assembly in Hong Kong, and numerous synodical assemblies, rostered leader's gatherings, and churchwide consultations.

Diane served on the consulting board and as a contributor to the Lutheran Study Bible (2009). Jacobson is, first and foremost, a lover of Scripture. "I'm in love with this Book," she says. "My calling is to teach Scripture for the sake of God's world, and to invite others into the wonders and rewards of exploring the Bible together."



## **Karoline Lewis**

Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching  
Luther Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Karoline M. Lewis ([www.karolinelewis.com](http://www.karolinelewis.com)) holds the Alvin N. Rogness Chair of Homiletics at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is a regularly featured preacher and presenter at the Festival of Homiletics.

Her newest book is, SHE: Five Keys To Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry. Karoline is the author of "John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary Series," the introduction and study notes for the Gospel of John in The Lutheran Study Bible, co-author of New Proclamation: Year B, 2009, as well as articles in The Christian Century, Feasting on the Word, Lutheran Forum, Word and World, Abingdon Preaching Annual, Currents in Theology and Mission, and Odyssey Network's ON Scripture. She is a contributing writer for WorkingPreacher.org, the author of the site's weekly column, Dear Working Preacher, and cohost of the site's weekly podcast Sermon Brainwave.



## **Bishop Patricia Lull**

Saint Paul Area Synod, ELCA

The Reverend Patricia Lull was elected bishop of the Saint Paul Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in May 2014. At the time of her election, Patricia was serving as the Executive Director of the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches. Previously, she worked in campus ministry at Augsburg College, as Dean of Students at Luther Seminary, and as Director of Lutheran Campus Ministry for the ELCA.

A native of Fremont, Ohio, Patricia attended the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, where she majored in religion. She completed her theological education at Yale Divinity School. Following her ordination in 1979, Patricia's first call was at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Alpena, Michigan, followed by a second call at Christ Lutheran Church in Athens, Ohio during which she also served as Lutheran Campus Pastor at Ohio University.

Patricia is deeply committed to inter-religious learning and to addressing issues of justice and poverty. She learned from her parents the importance of being deeply engaged in the community in which she lives and volunteers with Project Home, a shelter for homeless families in Saint Paul. She is a published writer and a frequent speaker on topics ranging from faith formation to leadership development.

Patricia has lived in Saint Paul since 2001 and is a member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Saint Paul.





## **Anna Marsh**

**Visiting Assistant Professor of Old Testament  
Luther Seminary**

Anna Marsh was Assistant to the Bishop in the Saint Paul Area Synod from 2014-2022. In 2022, she accepted a two-year position as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary. She earned her Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Interpretation with distinction from the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York, NY) and holds an M.A. in Old Testament from Luther Seminary. She earned her B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. Anna taught several courses as an adjunct instructor at Hamline University, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and at Luther Seminary. Her current research and teaching are focused on gender and literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible, and on food and drink in the Bible and ancient world.

Anna lives in Saint Paul with her family and enjoys meal planning, cooking, yoga, and swimming.





