

Summary of Statements of Beliefs and Convictions Southwood Lutheran Church

Love God, Love Others

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

Seeking Justice

At Southwood, we believe that our purpose is to grow in our love for God and in our love for others. One way that purpose is lived out is through acts of Justice.

Biblical Justice involves living and loving in such a way so that all people are treated equally and have the opportunity to flourish in life. It is caring for the creation that God has entrusted to us, and advocating for fair and equal treatment for all people. Southwood is committed to advancing the cause of justice.

Promoting Racial Equity

Southwood is committed to the work of confronting racism. We profess that the diversity of the human creation is a gift that allows us to see the breadth and beauty of God's work. We acknowledge that racism is a pervasive and recurring sin that turns us inward. Through grace we commit to the task of shedding our prejudices and both understanding and healing the harm racism has caused. We move forward in the knowledge that God has given us much more to bring us together than to divide us.

Loving LGBTQ+ Siblings

All people are created in the image of God and designed to be in loving relationships with other people and within a community. At Southwood, we trust in a God who defies boundaries and binaries, and who works through all people to proclaim Jesus' message of love. As Christians, we celebrate the expansiveness of God and how creative God is in molding God's people. Each of us has been given a gift from God to share with the world.

Because of this, Southwood commits to celebrating, affirming, and welcoming people of all genders and sexualities including those who identify as LGBTQ+, so they can equally participate and hear the Gospel message which is good news for all people. At Southwood, our LGBTQ+ siblings are invited to participate in all parts of the church, including ministry, marriage, sacraments, church leadership and volunteer opportunities.

Supporting Immigrants and Refugees

In living out God's love for all people, Southwood welcomes all immigrants and refugees in our community. Specifically, we advocate for just immigration policies and the protection of human rights.

Caring for God's Creation

Southwood is committed to stewarding the earth's resources to provide sustenance for all its current inhabitants while also preserving abundant resources for future generations. God entrusted the creation to each of us to protect, respect, and care for. We are dependent upon

nature and nature is dependent upon us. Southwood affirms its obligation to care for God's creation.

Promoting Gender Equity

As we grow in our love for God and others, we seek gender equity. Southwood acknowledges that gender biases restrict all of us from realizing abundant life and celebrating that people of every gender are created in God's image. At Southwood, all genders are invited to participate in the church, including ministry, sacraments, church leadership and volunteer opportunities.

Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS

Statement on Biblical Justice

Beliefs and Convictions¹

Seeking Justice

At Southwood, we believe that our purpose is to grow in our love for God and in our love for others. One way that purpose is lived out is through acts of Justice.

Biblical Justice involves living and loving in such a way so that all people are treated equally and have the opportunity to flourish in life. It is caring for the creation that God has entrusted to us, and advocating for fair and equal treatment for all people. Southwood is committed to advancing the cause of justice

Core Understandings of Justice

Biblical references to the word “justice” mean “to make right.” From a scriptural point of view, justice means loving our neighbor as we love ourselves and is rooted in the character and nature of God. As God is just and loving, so we are called to do justice and live in love with one another.

The Bible makes social justice a mandate of faith and a fundamental expression of Christian discipleship. Justice has its biblical roots in a God who time and time again shows love and compassion for all people, including the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, and the disinherited. To do justice is to live with the same love and compassion.

Because Southwood is committed to growing in our love for God and others, this faith leads us to uplift and advocate for all. Love for all of God's creation is an extension of our faith and relationship with God. Living out our faith and pursuing a deep relationship with God leads us to care for all people in society.

"Along with all citizens, Christians and others have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being and good order." (ELCA Social Statement, The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective, 1991, page 5).

¹ Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

Scripture that Leads Us

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

To be the kind of Christ-follower Jesus longs for, we must embrace justice and mercy. Jesus devoted much of his time to ministry with the poor, the marginalized, and other groups that were historically disenfranchised. Jesus calls all of us to stand together in solidarity under his commandments - thereby seeking justice and condemning systems of oppression.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4:18-19 NRSV

Jesus shared a message of concern for people, a message of justice, liberation and salvation.

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:17 NRSV

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24 NRSV

In these verses, God reminds us that outward demonstrations of faith are useless unless we are incorporating faith into our daily life. As a mission-focused church, this Bible verse aligns with the mind, heart, and soul of Southwood.

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12 NRSV

This scripture is commonly referred to as the Golden Rule. Jesus taught the Golden Rule as he travelled across the land. It is an incredibly helpful message, since it applies to most situations in life without need for a specific rule for every possible situation.

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. Proverbs 21:3 NRSV

In this verse, God is looking at our motives. We can boast to be a Christian and even attend worship regularly but we truly demonstrate our faith in our day-to-day life. Demonstrating sincere love and service to others is more important than details of formal worship. When we love God, we are asked to live a life that is right, good, and merciful to others.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; Luke 6:37 NRSV

Only God can see inside a person's heart. Jesus reminds us that the spirit of judgment with which we treat others will also be the spirit of judgment God will use to judge us.

Thus, says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. Jeremiah 22:3 NRSV

God created justice as a path out of oppression. All people deserve dignity, respect, and justice. God calls us to walk this path together with our siblings in Christ and condemn all forms of oppression.

Actions that Propel Us Forward[^]

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- *Communication/Education:*
 - Expand awareness of Southwood's social statements by including them on the church website.
 - Share additional context on Southwood's social statements by sharing a brief video and congregation-wide email with a link to the statements on Southwood's website.
 - Offer faith-based educational opportunities for the congregation focused on "Who is my neighbor/How can I support my neighbor?" in conjunction with the video/email distribution.
- *Community:*
 - Offer pastors, staff and the congregation opportunities to participate in Rethinking Justice efforts in Lincoln/Lancaster County. This interfaith group is focused on working together on topics tied to justice in the local community. Note: This work is funded by a grant offered through the United Methodist Church.
- *Internal Policies & Procedures:*
 - Annually review internal policies and procedures to ensure robust anti-discrimination practices are in place.
 - Continue commitment to equity in pay and hiring within the church.
 - Make efforts to use respectful & inclusive language in all Southwood programming and activities (i.e. parents vs mom/dad, undocumented immigrant vs illegal alien).
 - Ensure that anyone authorized to work in the United States is considered for open staff positions at Southwood, regardless of nationality or specific immigration status.
 - Encourage diversity, when possible, in all areas of Church life, including: Staff, Church Council/Advisory Boards, musical performances, volunteers, speakers & teachers.

[^]This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Love God, Love Others Promoting Racial Equity Beliefs and Convictions²

As we grow in our love for God and others, Southwood is committed to the work of confronting racism. We profess that the diversity of the human creation is a gift that allows us to see the breadth and beauty of God's work. We acknowledge that racism is a pervasive and recurring sin that turns us inward. Through grace we commit to the task of shedding our prejudices and both understanding and healing the harm racism has caused. We move forward in the knowledge that God has given us much more to bring us together than to divide us.

Scripture that Leads Us

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Genesis 1:26a and Genesis 1:31a NRSV

God cares how we treat each other because we're all created in God's image. God makes no distinction between the inherent value of one race or ethnicity over another.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 NRSV

This Bible verse shows God is greater than the distinctions created by humans. We are all a part of God's family and will inherit the kingdom of God.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. John 13:34 NRSV

This verse contains one of the most powerful commands given to Christians. Jesus states the life of a true believer is defined by loving all people. Jesus frames this as a new commandment, using his own example of love, as a standard.

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. Acts 10:34-35 NRSV

All people are on equal footing when it comes to receiving the gospel. We all have the opportunity to receive God's grace by believing in Jesus Christ.

² Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32 NRSV

God wants us to remove prejudice and build relationships so we can understand and appreciate each other in healthy ways.

Actions that Propel Us Forward[^]

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- *Worship:*
 - Incorporate focus on racial equity during worship service in conjunction with the federal Juneteenth holiday.
- *Communication/Education:*
 - Offer a congregation-wide small group opportunity focused on racial justice.
 - Offer culture competence training for Southwood staff. Explore opportunities to offer training to the congregation.

[^]This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Resources and Partners in Justice

- [ELCA Social Statement on Race, Ethnicity & Culture](#)

Love God, Love Others ***Loving our LGBTQ+ Siblings*** **Beliefs and Convictions³**

As we grow in our love for God and others, we believe all people are created in the image of God and designed to be in loving relationships with other people and within a community. We trust in a God who defies boundaries and binaries, and who works through all people to proclaim Jesus' message of love. As Christians, we celebrate the expansiveness of God and how creative God is in molding God's people. Each of us has been given a gift from God to share with the world.

Because of this, Southwood commits to celebrating, affirming, and welcoming people of all genders and sexualities including those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other sexual orientations/gender identities), so they can equally participate and hear the Gospel message which is good news for all people. At Southwood, our LGBTQ+ siblings are invited to participate in all parts of the church, including ministry, marriage, sacraments, church leadership and volunteer opportunities.

Scripture that Leads Us

Genesis 1 NRSV (Creation)

God's creation is vast and beyond our imaginations. We know that God didn't create just the night and day, as reflected in this passage, but also dawn and dusk. God's creation is not black and white, binary, but filled with nuance and unknowns. Because we are not God and do not know everything, we will always be learning about all of creation – including the vastness of differences that are expressed in people's genders and sexualities.

Genesis 2 NRSV (Relationships)

God created us to be in relationship with one another. Our relationships come in all different shapes and sizes: family, friends, partners. But we know from this scripture that when people are together and in loving relationships with each other, God rejoices. Celebrating relationships that reflect God's love is a gift Southwood supports.

Acts 8:26-40 NRSV (Eunuchs)

There are stories of eunuchs throughout the Bible. They are people who didn't fit into any cultural gender molds and were often seen as outsiders. However, we know from their stories – including the Ethiopian eunuch – that all are welcome into God's family, and Jesus' followers like Phillip (and us) are called by God to participate in the Gospel work with all people.

³ **Note on Biblical Contradictions:**

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. John 13:34 NRSV

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”³⁷ He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Matthew 22:36-40 NRSV

Throughout Jesus’ life and ministry, he teaches and proclaims a radical love of all people. Just as we have been loved and radically accepted by God, we are called to love in the same way every one of our siblings in Christ.

Actions that Propel Us Forward[^]

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- ***Communication/Education:***
 - Offer a congregation-wide small group opportunity for LGBTQ+ Friends and Allies.
 - Invite the congregation to a Pride picnic at Southwood in conjunction with local Pride activities.
- ***Internal Policies & Procedures:***
 - Explore opportunities to use gender-inclusive language in worship services and printed materials (i.e. siblings in Christ, parents vs mom/dad, etc). Reference ELCA-supported resources, whenever available.

[^]This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Definitions that Help Us

- ***Assigned sex at birth:*** The sex that is put on one’s birth certificate when they are born based on the presentation of their external genitalia and chromosomes.
 - ***Assigned male at birth:*** Someone whose assigned sex at birth was designated male.
 - ***Assigned female at birth:*** Someone whose assigned sex at birth was designated female.
- ***Bisexual (B)/Pansexual:*** Individuals who are attracted to more than one gender (or regardless of gender) not necessarily at the same time or to the same degree; attraction to one’s own gender and other genders (not their own).
- ***Cisgender:*** A person whose gender identity is the same as their assigned sex at birth.
- ***Gay (G):*** Sometimes used as an umbrella term for LGB people, gay primarily refers to men who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other men.
- ***Gender/Gender Identity:*** A person’s perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their assigned sex at birth or legal sex.
- ***Gender Expression:*** The way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through their appearance, dress, and behavior.

- *Intersex*: An umbrella term used for people who are born with reproductive anatomy or chromosomes that do not fit into the typical boxes of “female” or “male.”
 - Currently, many intersex individuals are assigned either male or female at birth. The use of X as a gender or sex marker is also becoming more common.
- *Lesbian (L)*: An individual who is primarily or exclusively attracted to other women.
- *Queer (Q)*: An umbrella term for a sexual identity that is not heterosexual.
- *Questioning*: A person who is contemplating their sexual orientation or gender identity. Questioning is a healthy identity development process for all people. Our perceptions of our identities may change with knowledge and experience but who we are does not.
- *Sexual Orientation*: This reflects who a person is romantically and/or physically attracted to (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, heterosexual). Sexual orientation is not determined by gender identity or expression.
- *Transgender (T)*: A person whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex at birth.
 - *Trans Man*: A person who was assigned female at birth who identifies as a man.
 - *Trans Woman*: A person who was assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman.
- *Two Spirit*: A person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity.
- +: There are a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities beyond the identities included here. The + (plus sign) was added to the acronym LGBTQ+ to reflect our growing understanding of identities and to include those identities under the + rather than continuing to the add to the acronym.

Resources and Partners in Justice

- [ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality](#)
- [Reconciling in Christ](#)
- Southwood recognizes there are scripture passages that Christians have historically used against the LGBTQ+ community. Click [here](#) to learn more about these scripture passages.

Love God, Love Others Supporting Immigrants and Refugees Beliefs and Convictions⁴

In living out God's love for all people, Southwood welcomes all immigrants and refugees in our community. Specifically, we advocate for just immigration policies and the protection of human rights.

Scripture that Leads Us

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Matthew 25:35 NRSV

In this verse, Jesus is saying to us: How you treat the most vulnerable is how you treat me. By uplifting those in need, we are fulfilling the call of Jesus. As followers, we are asked to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and welcome foreigners.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:7 NRSV

Jesus accepts us despite our problems and sins, and he asks that we accept one another. Each of us, with our differences, brings a special dimension to the church which brings glory to God.

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:34 NRSV

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. Exodus 23:9 NRSV

God took special care to see that people treated foreigners with love and mercy. God's rationale to them was that they too had been strangers and were oppressed in another land. God wants people to bless and care for others, no matter their nationality or immigration status.

⁴ Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2 NRSV

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 NRSV

God calls us to show hospitality and love to all.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

When Jesus shares this story, he emphasizes that to love God is to treat all people as our neighbors. God wants us to demonstrate love for our neighbor by showing compassion to all.

Actions that Propel Us Forward[^]

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- ***Communication/Education:***
 - Explore opportunities to incorporate an activity related to immigration into Southwood Serves.
 - Offer training opportunities for Southwood staff to improve awareness on the immigration process and immigration assistance programs.

[^]This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Resources and Partners in Justice:

- [ELCA Social Statement on Immigration](#)
- [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#)
- [Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services](#)

Love God, Love Others Caring for God's Creation Beliefs and Convictions⁵

As we grow in our love for God and others, Southwood is committed to stewarding the earth's resources to provide sustenance for all its current inhabitants while also preserving abundant resources for future generations. God entrusted the creation to each of us to protect, respect, and care for. We are dependent upon nature and nature is dependent upon us. Southwood affirms its obligation to care for God's creation.

Scripture that Leads Us

God looked at everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Genesis 1:31 NRSV

God throughout the timeframe of creation spoke all life into being. After each day, God marked the new creations by declaring their goodness. Each part of creation built upon the other until all that existed was functional, had purpose, and potential. God saw all of it and blessed it.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 NRSV

When God created the world, human beings were meant to work to help to accomplish God's purpose...which is to maintain the garden of Eden and all creation.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. Psalm 8:3-8 NRSV

In this psalm, David reflects on God's majesty that is displayed in the creation. The heavens declare God's glory. Against the backdrop of such glory, humans seem insignificant, yet God chose humans to care for the earth and all its creatures. By giving humans this awesome responsibility, God has crowned them with glory and honor.

Actions that Propel Us Forward[^]

⁵ Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- *Worship:*
 - Incorporate focus on God's creation during worship service in conjunction with Earth Day holiday.
 - Offer a Blessing of Pets service for the congregation and guests, commonly held in conjunction with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi (October).
- *Internal Policies & Procedures:*
 - Maintain existing internal efforts such as: compostable café supplies, transition to LED light bulbs (as applicable) and monitor HVAC settings.
 - Encourage distribution of handouts electronically vs paper at meetings.
 - Continue financial and volunteer support of the Southwood garden and incorporate earth-friendly efforts whenever possible (i.e. use of grass clippings for mulch, limited use of insecticides).
 - Analyze the use of plastic during mission trip travel and limit use whenever possible.
 - Create a Green Team consisting of Southwood staff and congregation members to consistently look at ways our church can be more "green friendly." This team serves as a sub-committee of the Finance & Facilities Advisory Board.

^This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Definitions that Help Us

- *Carbon Footprint:* The amount of carbon dioxide or other carbon compounds emitted into the atmosphere by the activities of an individual, company, country, etc.
- *Climate Change:* A long-term change in the earth's climate, especially a change due to an increase in the average atmospheric temperature, whether that change is natural or induced by human activity.
- *Dominion:* Throughout the Bible, scripture states humans have dominion or rule over all creation. At Southwood, we see our role as stewards of the earth. God created the universe and all that is within it. Humans must take care of creation and look after it.
- *Greenhouse Effect:* An atmospheric heating phenomenon creating increased temperatures on earth
- *Greenhouse Gas:* Any of the gases whose absorption of solar radiation is responsible for the greenhouse effect, including carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, and fluorocarbons

Additional Resources

- [ELCA Social Statement on Caring for Creation](#)

Love God, Love Others Promoting Gender Equity Beliefs and Convictions⁶

As we grow in our love for God and others, we seek gender equity. Southwood acknowledges that gender biases restrict all of us from realizing abundant life and celebrating that people of every gender are created in God's image. At Southwood, all genders are invited to participate in the church, including ministry, sacraments, church leadership and volunteer opportunities.

Sexism in Scripture

"We recognize 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...The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith empowers this church to challenge patriarchy and sexism, which devalue people according to sinful human standards." (ELCA Social Statement, Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action, p. 6-7)

Scripture that Leads Us

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. Mark 15: 40-41 NRSV

In these two short verses, Mark shows that the call to follow Jesus is not just for the elite, not just for Jews, not just of men, but for all. The women at the cross remind us that the true disciple is not the famous disciple but rather the faithful disciple.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So, they left the tomb

⁶ Note on Biblical Contradictions:

We acknowledge there are different interpretations and contradictions in the Bible. Most of these contrasts fall into one of two categories:

- First, the Bible is a collection of books written by different people at different times over many centuries. Contradictions may be expected when multiple authors and time periods are involved.
- Second, it is important to keep context in mind when trying to convey a passage. When looking at a specific verse and ignoring the larger context in which it was given, contradictory interpretations may develop.

quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Matthew 28:1-10 NRSV

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were commissioned by Jesus to become the first apostles. With great joy, they obey Jesus' command, bearing witness to the risen Christ. The command Jesus shares with these women is the command he shares with us all: Stop being afraid! God has defeated death. Rejoice and share the good news!

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. Luke 8:1-3 NRSV

This passage reveals that Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry may have been greatly hindered if women had not provided for his daily needs and those of his apostles. Women are vital to all ministry. Although they didn't get much praise, glory and attention, women were an important part of ministry.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 NRSV

Apostle Paul helps us understand that in Christ, we are all fully united in one family. There are no lesser Christians in the family of God. Our earthly identifiers create no value distinction between us in God's eyes. No gender is superior to another.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 NRSV

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. Ephesians 5:31 NRSV

In these verses, Apostle Paul speaks to the concept of mutuality and equity in marriage. Each person in a marriage has identical instructions and are to live by the same standards. There is no room for double standards or gender hierarchy in a Christian marriage.

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have

judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us. Acts 16:11-15 NRSV

Lydia plays a critical role in spreading the word of God. It all started with purple cloth. Purple dye was very rare in biblical times and Lydia owned a business dealing in purple cloth. Lydia's ability to buy and sell in purple dye meant she was quite a successful and well-respected business woman. For Apostle Paul, Lydia became a crucial ally in the mission to spread the news of Christ to faraway lands. Paul needed money to travel to these lands and he received it from business owners and philanthropists like Lydia.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. Romans 16:1-2 NRSV

Phoebe is another successful business woman in the Bible who uses her wealth and influence to grow the Christian church. The words in this scripture come from Apostle Paul's letter to Christians in Rome. Phoebe delivers this important letter as part of a business trip. Phoebe served as a deacon and benefactor in the church, so she played an important role in preaching, teaching and presiding at the Lord's Table.

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’” Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” And she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Judges 4:4-9 NRSV

Deborah was appointed by God to be a judge over Israel, and he uses her to free Israel from the hands of Jabin (a Canaanite king who had terrorized Israel for 20 years). Deborah commissions Barak to lead the armies of Israel into battle against this formidable foe. But he gets cold feet and is reluctant to go unless Deborah accompanies him. Deborah is a woman whose life is an example to men and women alike for she is willing and ready to be used by God to carry out a plan, no matter the difficulties and dangers.

Actions that Propel Us Forward^

Living out our love for God and others means that at Southwood, we encourage:

- *Worship:*
 - Explore opportunities to incorporate gender equity into worship.
- *Communication/Education:*
 - Offer congregation-wide small group opportunities for people in all stages and/or phases of life.

- *Internal Policies & Procedures:*
 - Explore opportunities to use gender-inclusive language in worship services and printed materials (i.e. siblings in Christ, parents vs mom/dad, etc). Reference ELCA-supported resources, whenever available.
 - Remove questions about gender on forms. If gender is a necessary item of information, use multiple options inclusive of all genders.

^This section may adjust over time to align with opportunities and developments within the church/community.

Definitions that Help Us

- *Binary (Gender Binary):* The concept that there are only two genders, such as male/female, man/woman, or masculine/feminine.
- *Expansive Language:* Language or imagery referring to God that is not limited to humanity or human categories: water, a rock, a hiding place, a mighty fortress, etc.
- *Gender/Gender Identity:* A person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their assigned sex at birth or legal sex.
- *Gender-Based Violence:* Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons, including but not limited to intimate-partner violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, verbal taunting, and human trafficking.
- *Inclusive Language:* Language that includes all genders when referring to humanity or God, for instance, using “humans” or “humankind” to talk about humanity, rather than “man” or “mankind.”
- *Intersectionality:* The acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination. To understand the impact, we need to consider everything and anything that can marginalize or disadvantage different people, such as gender, race, economic class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. These categories may overlap and can exacerbate each other when considering the impact of discrimination.
- *Non-binary (or Gender non-conforming):* Words that people who do not identify as “men” or “women” use to describe their gender (not sexuality). Their gender identity and/or biological characteristics may not fit with the dominant and expected ways of acting as or being a man or woman.
- *Patriarchy:* A social system that enables men to have more power than, and power over, women and people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. A patriarchal social system is dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men’s actions, voices, and authority. In various ways, this kind of social system operates to control women, girls, and people who do not fit society’s predominant ideas of maleness and masculinity.
- *Sexism:* Refers to what supports male privilege and reinforces prejudice and discrimination against women and girls due to their gender and against people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. Human actions and speech can be sexist, as can institutions, policies, and practices.

Resources and Partners in Justice:

- [ELCA Social Statement on Sexism](#)
- [Social and Legal Services through Nebraska’s Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence](#)