



EcoFaith Network of the Minneapolis Area Synod Leadership Team Comment

1. Introduction

This letter is intended to serve as comment from the EcoFaith Network of the Minneapolis Area Synod Leadership Team on the draft ELCA Social Message on Earth's Climate Crisis. The EcoFaith Network of the Minneapolis Area Synod seeks to bring congregations together as we build awareness and work towards building a more sustainable, just, and equitable community. As a network, we join together to take action for a new vision of God's creation. We applaud the ELCA for undertaking the process of creating a new social message on the topic of the climate crisis. Solving and mitigating the climate crisis will be the greatest task humanity faces in the 21st century, and our faith communities must stand steadfast on the front line of this issue to protect our siblings – whether they be human, animal, or land.

2. Aspects and Concepts To Keep

There are many aspects of this draft that we see as working well, while we will not list every one, we'd like to give three overarching concepts that are most important to be kept throughout the drafting process.

No single person, action, or law alone will fix the climate crisis, it is going to take the reshaping and, in some cases, recreation, of the current systems that we live in. We see this fact articulated throughout this draft. More than articulating it, this message offers positive concepts for how to think about and engage with systems that perpetuate the climate crisis. Specifically, lines 306 – 315 and lines 328 – 332 do this the best.

We appreciate the acknowledgement that low-income, BIPOC, and disenfranchised communities are hit first and hardest by the crisis. This fact is often lost in conversations about the climate crisis and can not be stressed enough. If it starts to feel like this point is being brought up too much, don't worry, bring it up more. Tackling the climate crisis can not be done without centering low-income, BIPOC, and disenfranchised voices inside of our church and addressing the numerous other

issues that plague communities (systemic racism, stagnant wages, lack of adequate access to health care – just to name a few). This fact is most poignantly addressed in lines 209 – 215.

As a group dedicated towards organizing our congregational communities towards effective climate action, the specificity offered in Section 7, entitled “How does the ELCA teach that climate change should be addressed?” deserves recognition. As a planet, we are far past the time where simply acknowledging the problem is sufficient. We are running out of time to avoid the most catastrophic scientific predictions and to do such, we need to take decisive action this moment. The specificity gives direction to those looking to act but who feel aimless, something that we feel should be a key goal of this message.

3. Aspects and Concepts To Change or Add

In offering praise, we also offer three overarching critiques that we feel will help the final draft achieve its goal of helping people across our church meet this kairos moment that we are in.

In 16 pages of content, this social message dedicates five pages to sharing scientific conclusions and data. While we believe science must be a bedrock of the decision-making process when it comes to the climate crisis, this to us feels excessive, makes the document less accessible, and appears out of touch with the current national conversation. According to a [Yale study on climate opinions](#), 72% of Americans believe climate change is happening and 57% believe it is caused by human activity. Thankfully, gone are the days where climate denial is a mainstream opinion. Its continued existence is a serious concern, but the large amount of time spent talking about why climate change is happening feels like it is there to change a small group of people’s minds – something we don’t think can be achieved by showing someone a graph or an excerpt from a study. While the inclusion does lengthen the document, and risks losing the attention of readers who would benefit from hearing philosophical and action oriented information from their church body. We ask that the amount of space dedicated to sharing scientific findings be reduced dramatically so that the message of inspiration and action can more clearly shine through.

We are a group dedicated to the idea that community organizing is one of the most powerful tools that exists when it comes to creating more just, equitable, and sustainable places to live. Advocacy and lobbying at all levels of government are important, but they must be done in tandem with efforts to organize community and help all people understand that they have power in this world to make lasting change. At the end of this letter we have included a list of specific line changes that we recommend,

some of which include opportunities to add language about the importance of community organizing, but we most importantly would like to see it added in Section 7, Subsection D, as we believe all expressions of our church are already participating in and have greater opportunities to organize. This could be done by on line 513 adding “Engage in acts of community organizing to build stronger relationships and more resilient communities which can take action to create meaningful climate solutions.”

This message starts out strong with the discussion of Genesis and the importance of interpreting the word “dominion” in Genesis 1:26 to mean serve and not exploit. We feel that this message does not continue throughout this message and that humans and the rest of the natural world are not treated as equals, but instead as separated ideas. The sins we commit against water, land, and animals are equally important to address and we find that fact to be missing in this draft. One specific section we see as most benefiting from an addition is Section 5, lines 299 – 304, with an inclusion of a confession of the sins that are committed to our natural world.

4. Conclusion

As previously stated, there is no bigger threat to our lives and the well-being of those who come after us than the climate crisis. We hold both truths that the ELCA has been addressing this threat since the creation of this church body and that there is still much more to be done. The creation of this new social message is a meaningful step forward as we can not expect congregations to act if our churchwide body is not willing to act. Thank you to all who have put in effort to get this draft completed and to who will work until a final draft is published.

Signed,

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5. Line Item Recommendations

Lines 175/176: Be more explicit that this is talking about an impending migration crisis, add “These changes in sea levels would creation a migration crisis unseen before in human history.”

Lines 181-183: Add “the overwhelming majority of people who experience these negative health outcomes are BIPOC and low income.”

Lines 285-288: these lines read as if clean energy advocates should reduce/stop their advocacy, which misdiagnoses the problem. This issue is that advocates need to remember the intersectional nature of climate change and that people live in an economic system that requires/makes families feel dependent on fossil fuel extraction to survive. Either remove these lines or change to “In addition, some workers have no choice but to survive off of income from fossil fuel extraction and feel vilified or disregarded. Clean energy advocates must work to make these voices feel seen in their work and keep criticisms towards those in power over systems and not those without power.”

Line 267: Change Section 5 title to “How to reconcile this kairos moment of climate change with our Lutheran faith.”

Line 407: After “marginalized” add “including creation itself, for it has no voice in the halls of advocacy.”

Line 447: Change “Increased incentives” to “Increased access”.

Under Line 448: Add “Increased programs that alleviate the requirement of wealth to access a climate positive lifestyle.”

Lines 505-507: Add “Hiring and maintaining professional staff to tend to our collective stewardship.”

Line 510: Add “and organize your neighbors to speak with a collective voice alongside you.”

Line 513: Add “Engage in acts of community organizing to build stronger relationships and more resilient communities which can take action to create meaningful climate solutions.”