

ELCSA Climate Justice Charter (draft proposal)

The second draft can be accessed [here](#).

Introduction:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) is a regional church with seven dioceses in four countries; Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and South Africa. The mission of the Church is to glorify and praise the name of the Triune God. It is realized by advocating for justice, peace and reconciliation for the people of God.¹

People of God are created in the image of God and being part of creation are given the responsibility to care for creation.² Contrary, they have been the source of destruction of God's creation, inducing climate change. Therefore, by carrying out her[?] mission, the church shall address negative and disproportionate effects of climate change, which includes protection of human rights, creating resilient and adaptive communities, raising awareness on the importance on nature conservation and a deeper understanding of the gift of interdependence of life in general, and the recognition and respect of the right of mother earth.

Preamble:

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15)³. The church is commissioned to preach good news to every part of the world, leaving no one behind, and that is a faith, moral and global principle in transforming the world. Creation groans and cries under the overuse, misuse and human induced climate change. Human beings and entire biodiversity are suffering, and the entire earth is under threat. Now, more than ever, creation needs gospel, both proclaimed and practiced.

Preaching the gospel refers to climate action which sought to transform the society's behaviour that continues to undermine the gifts of creation. It also means that the church should be ready to empower and stand for the marginalized and continuously degraded creation of God by human beings. ELCSA, therefore, commits to coordinate her[?] climate action through Green ELCSA. Green ELCSA is a coordinated initiative under which the mission of the church can be elevated for purposes of collaborative efforts within the church and in the ecumenical and civil society spaces.

Description:

The ELCSA Climate Justice Charter outlines important principles that guide ELCSA's climate action. In order to realize these principles, this document will outline pragmatic activities that will help the church to act strategically against climate change, which could be a complex issue in terms of political, social, economic and cultural analysis. It also aims at creating guidelines for members of the church that are stewards of creation or green champions.

Scope:

¹ Chapter 3.6 of ELCSA constitution

² Genesis 1:26

³ Mark 16:15b New International Version.

This document is a guideline for members of the church at all or any levels (i.e. congregational, parish, circuit, etc), when they are preparing or demonstrating their commitment for environmental care. The levels of achievements shall be measured based on the set expected outcomes of strategic issues, and some technicalities can be facilitated at churchwide, ELCSA Development Service.

Principles:

ELCSA Climate Justice Charter is based on the principles of people and churches' capacity to act against climate change, and understanding and committing to the following principles:

- 1) Climate Justice: Climate justice refers to climate change as an ethical and political issue. It links climate policies to human rights and sustainable development, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and climate policies equally and fairly. It refers to striving for environmental justice, justice to nature, gender equality and the protection and promotion of human rights for all. It is also encompassing the voices of indigenous peoples, access to sustainable energy for all, and a just transition for those whose jobs or livelihoods are threatened by ambitious climate policies.⁴
- 2) Intergenerational Equity: Intergenerational equity refers to the full, equal and meaningful participation of youth in all activities, processes and platforms for climate action. It is an integrated approach, concerning the wellbeing and equity of current and future generations, who most likely will face difficult living conditions in a changing climate, but who are not responsible for causing them. God cares for future generations (1 Tim 4:12; 1 John 2:14).
- 3) Gender Justice: ELCSA recognizes that women are disproportionately affected by long-term climate change, particularly in contexts where gender inequality is more pronounced. The specific competences and vulnerable conditions of women are often overlooked and women still have much less economic, political and legal power. Gender justice in the context of climate change is an approach to address and close these gaps by ensuring that gender equality and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women is at the heart of all climate discussions and actions, at all levels of decision making.
- 4) Human Rights: Human rights-based approaches address adverse impacts of climate change that threaten the human rights of climate vulnerable people. They call on duty bearers in governments to ensure the fulfilment of their obligations with regard to the respect for and protection of human rights standards and human rights principles.
- 5) Faith in Practice⁵: ELCSA has always been active in the wider society through word and deed. The church is called to communicate God's love for this world in word and deed. Therefore, when the church witnesses injustice and oppression in the worldly realm, it needs to speak out to

⁴ ACT Alliance advocacy booklet

⁵ James 2:14-26[?]

empower the weak, serve the needy and protect the vulnerable.⁶ All members of the church need to learn to give full, careful attention to the beauty, intricacy, or complex needs of the world.

- 6) Solidarity: Everyone's struggle is a shared struggle to sustain life. In the context of worsening climate change, international solidarity is central to climate justice as it serves to unite all who are struggling for emancipation and for a post carbon world, which calls on the church to fully engage in global forums.
- 7) Just Relationships: Just relationships for all God's creation (human beings and biological diversity), calls on the church to intensify her efforts to promote peace, justice, and reconciliation. And in the context of just transition,⁷ the church understands this initiative as a reconciliation process that should embrace the interdependence of human and natural systems, it also recognizes the urgency thereof.
- 8) Decoloniality: Colonial, neo-colonial and imperial domination are driving us towards extinction. This is based on the worship of extractives, technology, finance, violence and markets. The church's advocacy work should include actively delinking from this system as an affirmation of an emancipatory relationship between humans and with non-human nature rooted in our history, culture, knowledge and the wider struggle of the oppressed on the planet.
- 9) Prophetic diakonia: ELCSA, as a member of the Communion of Churches, sees her climate justice work as her prophetic diakonia.⁸ It is a life-affirming that flows forth from faith to transformative theology and is grounded in Scripture that calls for human dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation, and for stewardship of creation
- 10) Partnership and empowerment: The church's diaconal work is empowered by collaboration in the ecumenical, interfaith and civil society spaces, it also recognizes the importance engaging multilateral processes, including forums that deal with climate change, sustainable development goals (SGDs), the Africa We Want (Agenda 2063), and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

⁶ The Church in the Public Space. A Study Document of The Lutheran World Federation

⁷ Just Transition for South Africa:

https://pccommissionflo.imgix.net/uploads/images/22_PAPER_Framework-for-a-Just-Transition_revised_242.pdf

⁸ Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia

Strategies:

ELCSA believes that it is a fundamental matter of belief and responsibility to serve as a moral compass for shaping transformative agendas because of her deep rooted presence in all types of communities, which also make her a credible connector and implementer of climate policies. The church affirms her commitments to the following actions:

- 1) The church's stewards of creation should play an active role in conducting at least the following activities in their congregations and parishes:
 - Climate change education: awareness-raising and sharing of all relevant information on emerging climate issues, etc.
 - Environmental care: cleaning the environment, recycling, gardening, etc.
 - Climate justice advocacy: policy engagement in local governments and all other structures as much as possible.
- 2) The church should promote climate justice by amplifying the voices of communities affected by climate change impacts through theologically grounded and human rights-based advocacy, mobilization, campaigns and action at local, national and global level.
- 3) The church should educate and sensitize members and the general public to engage in environmental conservation efforts as an appreciation of the beauty of God's creation and as a factor in the climate change, and engage in activities such as afforestation, renewable energies, recycling and waste management.
- 4) All dioceses should strengthen their diaconal pr and advocacy desks with an objective of influencing governance, policies and societal norms and mobilizing communities to engage in confronting climate change
- 5) The church should support youth initiatives that develop their capacities to confront poverty and economic injustice and assist them with financial resources and vocational training and entrepreneurship.
- 6) The church should increase her prophetic voice and empower communities to demand their human rights
- 7) ELCSA parishes should consider developing biblical and ethical basis for creation conservation, according to their contexts, and integrate care for creation into the curricula of their educational activities.
- 8) The church should challenge unjust systems and policies by speaking truth to power and actively participating in policy making fora, lobby local and international policy makers to create policies favourable for climate justice
- 9) The church should engage in pressuring governments to have participatory and inclusive budgeting and in demanding accountability to citizens, especially on climate change matters.

Conclusion:

Moved by Jesus' passion and compassion to save and to serve humanity, this charter is about inspiring and calling upon the church, members and partners or friends of the church to implement and monitor the areas of action outlined above in order to effectively confront climate change and to improve the living standards of the people in our African communities. Congregations and parishes are hereby called upon to introduce this framework to their diakonia. They are also encouraged to collaborate with other churches, faith based organizations, civil societies, governments, and other stakeholders in tackling issues pertaining to climate change. In this regard, the ELCSA Development Service, through Green ELCSA, is expected to accompany parishes in implementing the areas of action spelt out in this charter.

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