

Note: This is an update to the November 2020 post “When Trust Is Broken: A Response to Allegations against Musician David Haas.”

When planning worship, pastors and musicians make important decisions about what their assembly will sing. What is sung is both an expression of the writer/composer and an act of faith by the singer. What we sing is linked to our memories and understanding of who God is and who we are as children of God.

For that reason, navigating choices become especially difficult when the composer or writer has been suspected of or accused of abuse. See the helpful article, [“Hymns by Abusers, Cancel Culture, and Pastoral Responsibility”](#) from the Center for Congregational Song.

In 2020, musician David Haas was accused of sexual misconduct by several women spanning many years. Although Haas is not a member of an ELCA congregation, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes four hymns by him: “Blest Are They” (ELW 728), “Now We Remain” (ELW 500), “We Are Called” (ELW 720), and “You Are Mine” (ELW 581). Several institutions have requested congregations to no longer sing works by Haas pending an investigation. Those who plan worship in the ELCA are strongly encouraged to discontinue use of these hymns and other compositions in worship. Both the ELCA and Augsburg Fortress have taken steps to discontinue suggesting hymns by Haas in worship planning resources for this church and to amend existing resources currently available online. The ELCA and Augsburg Fortress Publishers have no plans to include his works in future resources and publications. The ELCA and Augsburg Fortress Publishers do not tolerate sexual misconduct or abuse.

Some have also raised concern regarding composer Cesáreo Gabaráin (ELW 817) and several hymns included in *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (LLC)). Gabaráin died in 1991 before allegations of abuse against him became public. His publisher in the United States, Oregon Catholic Press (OCP) released an [updated statement](#) on these allegations in November 2024. The update noted that OCP is reinstating Gabaráin’s music in their catalog because their investigation did not find credibility in the accusations. However, due to concern, you will not find his hymns suggested in *Sundays and Seasons* at this time. Those who plan worship in the ELCA may want to consider not including hymns by Gabaráin.

This church believes that God’s intention, revealed through the Scriptures, is for all of creation to flourish ([Faith, Sexism, and Justice](#), p. 14). As the ELCA Social Message on [“Gender-based Violence”](#) declares, “God calls us to love. Gender-based violence is not love.... Simply stated, gender-based violence in all its forms is a sinful rebellion against the triune God and a rejection of God’s good work in this world” (p. 6). All forms of violence interfere with God’s beloved creatures flourishing. And when people abuse power and authority to break trust, they must be held accountable ([“Gender-based Violence,”](#) pp. 1-3, 6-7). This is particularly important when the people with power and authority serve in the church ([Human Sexuality](#), p. 35).

Although these particular circumstances do not directly involve the ELCA, we as a church know we participate in the sin of gender-based violence. Through our own teaching documents, we have declared,

As a church of Jesus Christ, we deplore this suffering and we confess our collective and individual complicities in this violence in both church and society. The complex factors that contribute to the prevalence of this sin are deeply woven into society and into individual lives. As a member of Christ's body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) shares in the brokenness and judgment brought on by gender-based violence. This church's members are survivors, perpetrators and bystanders. ("Gender-based Violence," pp. 2-3).

As you plan music for worship in your context, we encourage decisions that uphold God's call to love the neighbor, especially those who have been harmed by gender-based violence. The ELCA resource, [*Principles for Worship*](#), states that "assembly song forms memory and nurtures faith" and that "planning for worship calls for careful attention to the people's memory" (Principle M-5; Application M-5C). When we become aware of songs that have positive associations for some are associated with painful memories and deep trauma for others, our concern for any who have been traumatized must be the church's first priority. As noted in a recent document by the Mennonite church,

For survivors, singing a song of a known abuser can cause the traumatic harm of sexual violence to viscerally rush in. This is especially true when the abuser is alive or recently deceased. When people directly injured by the abuser's violence experience a song as inseparable from its source, communities of faith cannot claim to make such a separation without doing harm to survivors.

[Show Strength: How to Respond When Worship Materials Are Implicated in Abuse.](#)

The same document outlines specific steps in a survivor-centered response and provides suggestions for how to address this issue in your community. While certainly challenging, we cannot shy away from these difficult conversations and turn from our responsibility to show solidarity with those who are abused.

As a church, the ELCA continues to learn, to act, and to trust God's promise of presence, forgiveness, and guidance. As church together, we are always being made new to serve the neighbor in love, to end gender-based violence. To spread the word about this love for neighbor, join the World Council of Churches in Christ [#ThursdaysinBlack](#), a global ecumenical campaign to prevent and end gender-based violence.

Anyone with knowledge of sexual misconduct or abuse in the ELCA should report it to their synod or to [ELCA Safe Place](#). If the misconduct or abuse relates to children, it should be reported immediately to law enforcement.

Additional Resources

- [Hymns by Abusers, Cancel Culture, and Pastoral Responsibility](#). This blog post was written by Brian Hehn, Director of the Center for Congregational Song
- Report from [Into Account](#)
- [Gender-based Violence](#), ELCA Social Message adopted by Church Council in 2015
- Child Protection, ELCA Social Message adopted by the Church Council in 2026.
- [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#), ELCA Social Statement adopted by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly
- Lowe, Mary Elise and Mary Streufert. [ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Faith, Sexism, and Justice](#) (Augsburg Fortress, 2025).
- [Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust](#), ELCA Social Statement adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly
- [#ThursdaysinBlack](#), a global ecumenical campaign to prevent and end gender-based violence.
- [Research conducted at the 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women](#) includes rates of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence.
- [ELCA Principles for Worship](#)
- [ELCA Safe Place](#) to report misconduct
- Lutheran World Federation [2017 Assembly resolution](#) for every member church to work within their church to address gender-based violence
- [Show Strength: How to Respond When Worship Materials Are Implicated in Abuse](#). This resource from the Mennonite church offers a survivor-centered perspective on how individuals and communities of faith can respond when it is discovered that beloved songs and prayers were written by a person who has perpetrated sexual violence.

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