

ELCA CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH —

Informing Care for Creation Action in Our Civic Lives

by Donna Rasmussen, Care for Creation Network

A presidential election year brings civic engagement to the forefront of our lives as we weigh our choices for voting. Care for creation, in particular climate change, is urgent among those social issues affected by this year's election which require discernment to understand how faith and civic life interact. The ELCA is developing a social statement on civic life and faith, which was called for by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to help understand the relationship between church and state. It can be useful in helping us make decisions about voting and in our overall civic involvement.

As the introduction to the draft social statement states, "Daily we are to pray as Jesus taught: 'Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.' These words teach us that God's will seeks the well-being of creation and all aspects of human life, including civil society." The statement goes on to say that human beings are inherently social and, therefore, political beings. God intends that we use our knowledge and intellect to foster the common good through our social institutions, policies and regulations.

A number of social issues have become highly politicized, such as immigration, health care, and climate change. Whether we like it or not, addressing these issues means engaging in the political process and making choices about who will represent us in government and the policies they will support. In addition, we should give government workers respect for "good and just work"



while also holding them accountable. It also means that as we serve God and our neighbors, we draw on our faith and values to support our civic participation.

"The ELCA encourages individuals and worshiping communities to work together toward a civic life that better reflects God's vision for a more just and reconciled world. ... Faith-informed advocacy of various kinds can play a transformative role in a polarized political world by bringing people together to work toward the common good in public life." From a creation care perspective, the social statement can help guide important discussions within our own congregations, and the church as a whole, about our actions affecting climate and the environment and the consequences of those actions for such things as social justice, equity and fairness in the broader society.

The draft social statement can be found on the ELCA website (Civic Life and Faith—Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (www.elca.org)). Feedback on the social statement can be submitted via an online survey until Sept. 30, 2024.

The ELCA Task Force on Studies for Civic Life and Faith also released a study curriculum to facilitate conversation about religious liberty, the

proper role of the church in relation to government, and many other critical topics. The preparation of this study was part of the process toward developing the social statement and is still available online. The curriculum has six sessions. Each session comes ready to use, with a teaching video, prayers, hymn suggestions, Scriptures, group discussion questions, suggested resources, and case studies taken from everyday life.

Give feedback on Social Statement

The ELCA is developing a Civic Life and Faith Social Statement and is seeking public feedback on the draft version. People are invited to study and give feedback on the draft by filling out an online survey by Sept. 30, 2024.

After the feedback period has closed, the task force will revise the draft with attention to the public input and submit a proposed version of the social statement to the ELCA Church Council, which will vote on sending it to the ELCA 2025 Churchwide Assembly for consideration. If adopted at the assembly by a two-thirds margin, the social statement will become the official social teaching of this church.

To access the draft and the survey, go to www.elca.org/civicsandfaith.