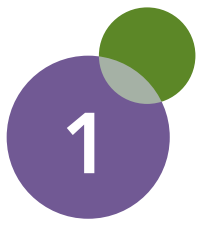


# A STUDY CURRICULUM ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH

## PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



## SESSION 1: HOW IS GOD'S INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP LIVED OUT IN A DEMOCRACY?

*Discerning together as people of grace: an introduction to social statements, the study, civic topics, and the gift of unity as God's people in dialogue, even when there is disagreement.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text***.

### WELCOME

We are disciples of Jesus Christ who happen to live in a democracy, although God's people have lived under every kind of government. Whatever the type, followers of Christ have had to figure out how to serve God, our highest authority, within that society. Being civically engaged is vital for disciples because through government many of the needs of our neighbors are met—or ignored.

For these reasons, in 2019 the Churchwide Assembly—the ELCA's highest legislative body—authorized development of “an ELCA social statement on government, ***civic engagement*** and the relationship of church and state” in order to “probe for shared convictions and establish this church's comprehensive teaching” on this important question. This study invites you into that conversation.

### OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Trinity, you call your people to responsible citizenship for the sake of your world. Help us to be faithful disciples who care as you do about the common good. We give thanks for the aspirations of this society toward democracy and justice for all, even while admitting our fears and acknowledging failures. Be with each of us as together we study these topics relevant to civic life and faith. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. In all that we say and do, may we strengthen each other as siblings in Christ. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE

“How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together in harmony!”  
(Psalm 133:1 GNT).

### HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- “O God of Every Nation” (ELW 713, LBW 416)
- “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (ELW 841, LBW 562)

### PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The old adage advises us never to discuss “religion, politics, or sex,” but this study invites participants to engage in two of the three! Yes, talking about our differences may open up controversy, which can be scary and difficult. However, controversy is not new in the church. The good news is that we don't all have to agree to be God's people together; our unity and core Christian identity are already given to us by God. Acts 15 illustrates an early church controversy and makes clear that our unity derives from God's grace alone.

#### Read Acts 15:1-2, 6-7, 11

<sup>1</sup>Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup>And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. ... <sup>6</sup>The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. ... <sup>11</sup>On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does or doesn't it surprise you that there was "no small dissension and debate" (read "sharp controversy") among the first generation of Jesus' followers?
2. Do you regard controversies in your congregation differently when you remember that "we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will?"
3. Peter's words show how Christian unity is a gift from God in Christ rather than a result of being in full. How does this affect your view of what unites people in your congregation?
4. What controversial issues related to civic life and faith might challenge your group?
6. What things are most important to your personal identity? How do or don't you relate to the idea of a "mega-identity" that walls you off from others?
7. Rev. Willer defines politics as how we conduct human government for the **common good**. How do you imagine our society would look if there were zero politics and no means of influencing governmental structures?

## CREATING A CONVERSATION COVENANT

A covenant is different from a contract, which governs a transactional exchange of goods, services, funds, etc. Covenants are about establishing a certain kind of relationship, and they are deeply rooted in Scripture (recall God's covenants with Noah and with Abraham in Genesis).

Baptism is a covenant God makes with us, promising that "the one who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). The person being baptized, or their parents and sponsors, also makes promises, as a grateful response to God's love. United by baptism, God's people sometimes make promises to one another about their relationship during any activity.

A covenant for relationship during conversation honors God's call that we talk together honestly. It is a commitment to seek the truth together in a respectful way, guided by Jesus' command to love one another. Such a covenant allows participants to share perspectives, receive new facts, come away with fresh insights, and consider what we might do together as God's people.

## VIDEO PRESENTATION: MAIN POINTS

- To help you understand the fundamental ELCA commitment that, as we talk together about tough social issues, we form a community of moral deliberation.
- To explain how this study will inform the social statement.
- To give you a sneak preview of the other sessions in this study.
- To help you understand why talking about civic life or "politics" is very hard today.
- To introduce you to the idea of a conversation covenant.

## POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the ELCA is providing this study, and why do you think your involvement is important to the social statement process?
2. Name one key point you recall about being a community of moral deliberation.
3. Identify one experience of **partisan polarization** in your life.
4. Spell out one idea about a conversation covenant that you find important.
5. When talking about polarizing topics, what helps you to feel heard and respected?

## COVENANT COMMITMENT LITANY

### LOOKING FORWARD

The remaining sessions will help us think about these important questions:

- Session 2: How Do Christians Talk Together About Controversial Civic Issues?
- Session 3: What Are Lutheran Views on Civic Life?
- Session 4: What Are Our Objectives in American Democracy?
- Session 5: What's Faith-Based Living Got to Do With Civic Life?
- Session 6: How Do We Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord in Civic Life?

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZMYB6VZ> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

Visit the website for the “civic life and faith” social statement at [ELCA.org/civicsandfaith](https://elca.org/civicsandfaith).

Read the ELCA social message “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy” and other social teaching statements at [ELCA.org/socialstatements](https://elca.org/socialstatements).

### BOOKS

Klein, Ezra, *Why We're Polarized* (Avid Reader Press, 2020).

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, *American Government: Power and Purpose* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2021).

## GLOSSARY (Note: some words are used only in the video.)

**Civic engagement:** this phrase points to various ways individuals and institutions engage public/civic life. Examples include fervent prayer for governmental leaders, voting, local service in volunteer agencies, street demonstrations, contacting legislators, public service, and many others.

**Common good:** while this term has various descriptions in philosophy, the use here is the general idea of what is beneficial for all or most members of a given community. In particular it is assumed that seeking the general welfare of all members of the public is the purpose of government and is achieved, if often flawed, in collective action, citizenship, and other forms of active participation in the realms of politics and public service.

**Community of Moral Deliberation/Discernment:** a concept established in the first ELCA social statement, Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective. Expresses how the whole Christian community shares in the responsibility of praying for each other, studying scripture, and wrestling toward moral understanding and action. It is a ground-up way of doing ethics in the ELCA rather than top down. The first social statement specifies this practice as an element of the ELCA's identity into which our church must grow. Its roots are found in Reformation writings—such as the Smalcald Articles—that spell out the marks of the church. This mark is “the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.”

**Discernment:** the practice of evaluating multiple factors found in an issue with the intent to make an appropriate response to the matter that is God-pleasing. It generally implies theological or ethical reflection that involves study, prayer, and dialogue. It is a practice that seeks wisdom from God's Spirit in order to make a decision not according to our own desires but as much as possible according to God's will. See Romans 12:1-2.

**Mega-identity:** An interlocking set of identifications, such as being urban, rural, ethnic, religious, conservative, liberal, that is loaded with huge emotional stakes and has become semi-fixed as an identity to the point that it walls off people from others who don't share the same set of characteristics or beliefs.

**Partisanship:** the strong and sometimes blind adherence to a specific party, group, faction, set of beliefs, or personal characteristics.

**Partisan Polarization:** a partisanship that so completely distinguishes itself from another group that the other's beliefs and views are considered utterly opposite and most often inferior, dangerous to society, and unworthy of talking about together. The polarization is such that the value of and respect for “those” people is absent. A common descriptor: it's my way or the highway.

**Politics:** a term from the Greek (the polis) that designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in the community. It is the activity through which people make decisions about “who gets what, when, where, and how.” It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good.

**Theology:** While this term can indicate academic or abstract reflection, the use in this study refers to faith's expression when talking about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, does theology when expressing thoughts about God, the church, etc.

# CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH STUDY GROUP COVENANT

Our commitment is to lift up the body of Christ through words and actions that:

- Follow the Golden Rule: do unto others as I expect them to do unto me.
- Model respectful and careful listening, without interrupting.
- Strive to understand each other's insights and experiences.
- Speak honestly, as an individual rather than for a group.
- Do not presume that others speak on behalf of a group.
- Utilize any technology constructively and not as a distraction.
- Step up to share thoughts, then step back to allow others to share theirs.
- Be mindful of viewpoints not represented.
- Fervently seek the Holy Spirit's presence and blessing in the group and our civic life.

# COVENANT LITANY OF COMMITMENT

(Leader reads standard font; **participants read bold font.**)

Our faith teaches that there is one body of Christ and one Spirit,

**One hope in our calling,**

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

**One God and Parent of all, who is above all, through all, and in all,**

And through whom, even as we are one in Jesus Christ,

**We acknowledge our varied identities and views.**

Holy Spirit, as we bind ourselves to this covenant, help us to listen.

**We commit to hear one another,**

To make room for every voice and every heart's concern.

**We commit ourselves to seek to understand and respect one another.**

Holy Spirit, as we engage in conversation, help us to express ourselves honestly.

**We commit to bring our own voices as we are able,**

With our words, with our body language, and with our silence,

**Whether with conviction or confusion, but always with respect.**

Holy Spirit, as we explore civic life and faith, help us to remember we are one in Christ.

**We commit to ask honest questions, to assume the best of one another,**

to follow the Golden Rule, to treat one another as we would want others to treat us.

**We commit ourselves to value community with one another,**

Even when there is tension and discomfort.

We ask for your grace, dear God, to keep this covenant we have made,

**And for forgiveness when we stray from it.**

We pray for hearts and minds that are open to one another

**And open to your presence in our midst.**

In the name of Jesus we ask this.

**Amen.**



## SESSION 2: HOW DO CHRISTIANS ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL CIVIC ISSUES?

*Discerning what we believe individually and as a Church.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text.***

### WELCOME

Dealing with controversial issues is a significant challenge for all of us. Whether on social media or in face-to-face conversations, rhetoric can grow heated, straining friendships and family ties. Even when we would rather avoid controversy and stay at peace, we know the stakes of some issues are too high to ignore.

In this session, we will explore elements for constructive engagement when addressing controversial issues as a community of moral discernment. Looking at the history of the church and examining contemporary examples, we can learn from the successes and mistakes of the church's more-than-2,000-year history of engagement with critical issues. From that history, six elements emerge as particularly helpful: (1) understanding the issue as objectively and unbiasedly as possible, (2) listening to different voices close to the issue, (3) praying for clarity of mind to discern the Spirit's wisdom, (4) discerning together how the Holy Scriptures illuminate the issue, (5) acting with the boldness of love and the humility of faith, and (6) confessing how even our best efforts fall short as we acknowledge that everything ultimately depends on God's grace.

### OPENING PRAYER

A prayer from Martin Luther:

Dear heavenly Father, say something. I will gladly remain silent and be a child and student. If I ruled my life with my own knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, I would have been sunk long ago. Therefore, dear God, you guide and direct it. I will gladly forsake my point of view and understanding and let you rule alone through your Word. Amen. (Thomas McPherson, *Prayers of the Reformers* [Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2017], 51)

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>1</sup>Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, <sup>3</sup>saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" <sup>4</sup>Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, <sup>5</sup>"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. <sup>6</sup>As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup>I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>8</sup>But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' <sup>9</sup>But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' <sup>10</sup>This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. <sup>11</sup>At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup>he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup>If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:1-18).



## LITANY (Adapted from *This Far by Faith*)

Leader: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your loving kindness. In your great mercy, wash away our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin.

**All: Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Leader: Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life.

**All: Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and sustain us with your Spirit. Amen.**

## HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- "O God of Light" (ELW 507)
- "Ubi caritas et amor/Where True Charity and Love Abide" (ELW 642, WOV 665)
- "Bind Us Together" (TFF 217, WOV 748)
- "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" (ELW 656, WOV 370)
- "God Is Love" (ACS 1041)

## PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

1. Recall, as you are willing, how disagreements and differing beliefs were dealt with when you were young:
  - Among the adults in the household where you were raised.
  - By your childhood friends, neighbor kids, and classmates.
  - Among your extended relatives.
  - In your faith community, if applicable.
2. How do you think these early experiences shaped you and your ways of addressing conflict and differences as an adult?

## OUR EXAMPLE IN ACTS 11

Consider what happened to Peter according to Acts 11. The animals that Peter was told to "kill and eat" were forbidden foods. That prohibition was not a human invention; according to Leviticus 11, those dietary restrictions had been given by God through Moses. Likewise, the rite of circumcision had been mandated directly by God to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17. In fact, God had

decreed that "any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:14).

Therefore, what Peter was asked to do in this vision was very significant: to eat what God had said was unclean to eat and to "make no distinction between them [the uncircumcised] and us [the circumcised]" (Acts 11:12). This was extremely controversial! Yet it was clear to Peter that this change was from God. Therefore, he convinced other leaders of the early church to embrace that change, namely that "what God has made clean, you must not call profane" (11:9) and that "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (11:18).

- Peter and the other leaders of the early church had to discern whether this vision and its instructions were truly from God. What criteria can we use to determine whether new insights and interpretations accord with God's will?
- Peter asked, "Who was I that I could hinder God?" How might our current level of polarization and vitriol hinder God's mission in the world?
- What rules seem unchangeable in your church, community, profession, country, and so on? What purpose do they serve?
- Are there any sacred rules or interpretations that God might be calling us to rethink or even change?
- Do you think God's mind can be changed? Can the meaning of sacred texts change over time?
- God's instructions to Peter changed Christianity forever. How do we balance faithfulness to tradition with openness to new possibilities inspired by the Holy Spirit?

## POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Remember a time when a group you were part of had to engage in a controversial issue. What did you learn from the process? What was helpful and what wasn't? Did you use any of the elements listed in the video? How did you use them?

2. Reflect on an experience when you saw the church engage in a controversial issue in a way that you thought was helpful. What was the issue? How did the church address it? What was helpful about the approach?
3. Consider how you think the Holy Scriptures can shed light on controversial issues. What teachings or passages from Scripture have you found to be particularly helpful when dealing with controversial issues?
4. What resources do you rely upon for expert analysis and unbiased understanding of controversial issues?
5. What are ways to listen to the different voices that are close to an issue? How can we hear and seek to understand perspectives that are radically different from our own?
6. How do people of faith address opinions that encourage hatred, violence, or prejudice?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, and gifts of your specific church community. Are there any current civic issues that your community of faith is particularly well-placed to engage in a helpful way? Which ones? How can you begin to address them?

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## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### PROMPTS FOR ACTION OUTSIDE THE STUDY GROUP

- As a group, compile and curate a list of news outlets that you find particularly trustworthy. Make sure you include sources from different ideological viewpoints (e.g., conservative, liberal, libertarian, progressive, etc.). Divide

them into two categories: those that are good about describing the facts without bias and those that offer reasonable analysis from an ideological standpoint.

- Organize events where you invite experts on controversial issues important to your community to participate in dialogue panels. Plan them as an opportunity to model respectful listening as you hear directly from people on different sides of an issue, and set them up not as a debate or with goals to convince others but to help people understand different perspectives.
- Establish a regular prayer group where people from different ideological camps come together to pray for the well-being of the community without directly engaging in debates on issues.

## WEBSITES

Book of Faith Initiative 4-Fold Method of Reading Scripture: <https://tinyurl.com/24czs7wh>

The Kettering Foundation: Dedicated to identifying and practicing what it takes to make democracy work as it should through responsible citizenship, robust democratic practices, and working together to address common problems. [www.kettering.org/](http://www.kettering.org/)

Braver Angels: A national movement to bridge the partisan divide, bringing conservatives and progressives together on equal terms to understand their differences, find common ground where it exists, and help the country we all love find a better way. [braverangels.org/](http://braverangels.org/)

Baylor Public Deliberation Initiative: A set of helpful guiding principles for public deliberation on difficult issues, offered by Baylor University. [www.baylor.edu/pdi/index.php?id=966174](http://www.baylor.edu/pdi/index.php?id=966174)

## BOOKS

Birch, Bruce C. and others, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life: A New Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

Schade, Leah D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

## GLOSSARY (Note: Some words are used only in the video.)

**Civic engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public/civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for government leaders.

**Community of Moral Deliberation/Discernment:** A concept established in the first ELCA social statement, Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective and considered an element of the ELCA's identity into which our church must grow. The concept envisions the whole Christian community praying for each other, studying Scripture, and wrestling together toward moral understanding and action. This approach to doing ethics is ground-up, rather than top-down. Its roots are found in Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles of the Book of Concord that spell out the marks of the church, one of which is "the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters."

**Politics:** From the Greek term "polis" for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good.



## SESSION 3: WHAT ARE LUTHERAN VIEWS ON CIVIC LIFE?

*Discerning common Lutheran theological themes regarding civic life.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text.***

### WELCOME

From our church's beginnings in 16th-century German lands, the reformers who inspired and shaped Lutheranism sought to be both active followers of Christ and engaged members of social and political communities. Some consider our spiritual and worldly lives to be radical opposites. Others imagine a rigid hierarchy where religious concerns are more important than worldly needs. The Lutheran tradition has resisted these extremes, offering a vision that God works through human hands and commits to the flourishing of our shared lives.

The Lutheran reformers arrived at this vision by spending time with the stories of God and God's people in the Bible. We see in Scripture a God who wants to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

While sharing much in common with the larger Christian tradition, the reformers also crafted unique theological vocabulary to describe and understand God's work in and through the world. In the household and the sanctuary, the family room and the courtroom, Lutherans believe that God is living and moving. Always inspired to ask, "What does this mean?," Lutherans seek to understand how God might be calling us in ever-changing times.

### OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, through your prophets you awaken us to your desire for justice and the common good. May justice roll like a river, and righteousness and integrity like an ever-flowing stream. Drive us out into costly service for the sake of others. Give us strong hearts and voices to satisfy your desire for justice for the most vulnerable and oppressed. Inspire us to engage in the good trouble of the gospel, following the example of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE

"Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:23-24).

### LITANY (Adapted from *This Far by Faith*)

Leader: God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,

**All: You have brought us this far along the way.**

Leader: In times of bitterness, you did not abandon us,

**All: But guided us into the path of love and light.**

Leader: In every age you sent prophets

**All: To make known your loving will for all humanity.**

Leader: The cry of the poor has become your own cry;

**All: Our hunger and thirst for justice is your own desire.** (From *This Far by Faith*)

### HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- "Let Justice Flow Like Streams" (ELW 717, TFF 48, WOV 763)
- "Let Streams of Living Justice" (ELW 710)
- "God of Grace and God of Glory" (ELW 705, LBW 415)
- "Caninemos con Jesús" (ACS 1061)

## PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

POSITIVE EXPERIENCE
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

Recall face-to-face or digital conversations in which political issues were discussed. If possible, recall a positive example of people airing different opinions, in which no one made assumptions about others' beliefs, people were given time to reflect, and genuine concerns were shared and heard. Then, recall a less congenial discussion in which people felt dismissed or lectured, the conversation turned aggressive, or difference of opinion divided people.

With your discussion partner, reflect upon the similarities and differences in your experiences.

- How did it feel to emerge from a healthy conversational experience? How did it feel to emerge from an unhealthy conversational experience? What sticks with you from each experience even after some time has passed? How did the conversation change the relationships between people involved in it?
- Many people have felt heightened anxiety after negative experiences discussing polarizing issues. How does it feel remembering the negative incident now?
- How do you view this experience through the lens of your faith? What responsibility do you feel to have conversations with people with whom you disagree? How does your faith shape how you respond and react to people with differing opinions? What dangers, if any, do you see in avoiding difficult discussions with those with whom you disagree?

- How do you think your experiences have shaped your outlook on civic matters and what can, or cannot, be discussed in the church or among people of faith?

### Deuteronomy 16:18-20:

<sup>18</sup>You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. <sup>19</sup>You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. <sup>20</sup>Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

- In Deuteronomy, Moses spoke to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. His instructions spelled out boundaries within which the people were to live to remain faithful to God. Why does or doesn't it surprise you that the passage includes directions for local government?
- Imagine that the prophets could communicate God's will to us in our current time and place. What might they tell us about how our discipleship should look in life and in politics?

## POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Lutherans understand sin as both individual and societal, and understand themselves as simultaneously sinful and righteous. If there are no "good people" or "bad people," and if our sins are woven into societal systems, how then should we respond to injustice in societal systems?
2. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, talk of "kingdoms" was common, but this is no longer the case. How would you update the word "kingdom" to match our modern experience in a democratic society?
3. Lutheran tradition frequently emphasizes God's way of working through the coercive power of laws (God's "left hand"). This suggests that, in our hearts, we would rather disobey. How might acknowledging our sinfulness as individuals help our mutual dialogue in a polarized time?

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social message, "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy": [ELCA.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/government](https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/government)

### ARTICLES

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Gorski, Philip S., and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

4. At one extreme we fear overzealous and misguided movements, just as the reformers worried about violent rebellions and war. At the other extreme we worry about passivity and excessive deference to those in authority, the kind of complacency that lets injustice and oppression run rampant. Which threat—passivity or misguided activity—worries you more, and why?
5. Before the Reformation, religious callings were celebrated careers whereas household work, average jobs, and public service were regarded as inferior. Lutheran thinking in the Reformation radically reshaped how we value work and service in the world. Today, public service (especially elected office) is perhaps again considered far from holy. How might this contribute to a disconnect between faith in God, discipleship, public service, and even voting?
6. Conversations about politics, government, and civic life can be contentious and polarizing. Would you prefer your church community to be a place for tough conversations and discernment, or a place of rest, where people can be free from political conversations, conflict, and division? What are the perils of each option?

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What ideas do you have for connecting our Lutheran theological and historical inheritance with the challenges we face today?
2. What opportunities do you find invigorating and exciting as you understand your calling in our shared civic life?

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XZYYN8R> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

## GLOSSARY (Note: Some words are used only in the video.)

**Book of Concord:** A collection of writings from 1580, published on the 50th anniversary of the 1530 Augsburg Confession, that were subscribed to by some 80 princely and municipal governments and are generally understood as authoritative documents of the Evangelical/Lutheran movement. The most widely adopted include the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and Luther's catechisms, but all have some status among today's Evangelical/Lutheran churches

**Bonhoeffer, Dietrich:** German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident. Among other things, he is known for his writings on the Christian role in civic engagement and was a key founding member of the Confessing Church. (See "Confessing Church.")

**Cheap grace:** A term from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship* that he describes as preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, as grace without discipleship, as grace without the cross, and as Christian faith without Jesus Christ, the living and incarnate one.

**Christian nationalism:** A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of certain Christian views with American civic life. This political ideology, whether explicit or not, includes the beliefs that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired and enjoys godly status, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S., that the nation holds a special status in God's eyes, and that good Americans must hold Christian beliefs. Proponents range from those who believe the U.S. should be declared a Christian nation (approximately 21% of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, anti-democratic, or gang like.

**Civic Engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public/civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for government leaders.

**Clericalism:** The belief, policy, and practice maintaining the power of a religious hierarchy.

**Community of Moral Deliberation/Discernment:** A concept established in the first ELCA social statement, *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* and considered an element of the ELCA's identity into which our church must grow. The concept envisions the whole Christian community praying for each other, studying Scripture, and wrestling together toward moral understanding and action. This approach to doing ethics is ground-up, rather than top-down. Its roots are found in Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles of the Book of Concord that spell out the marks of the church, one of which is "the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters."

**Law and Gospel:** Expresses the key Lutheran emphasis that God's Word and work in human society occur under different means. "Law" is understood to have two forms: (1) as a directive and corrective for society (first, or civil, use) and (2) judgment on sin (second, or theological, use). The term "Gospel" is the good news of God's mercy, received in faith on account of Jesus Christ.

**Luther, Martin (1483-1546):** German priest, theologian, author, and professor. He was a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation and is the namesake of Lutheranism.

**Politics:** From the Greek term "polis" for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good.

Priesthood of all believers: The view elaborated in the Reformation that all baptized Christians enjoy equal spiritual status in the sight of God, with equal capacity to have faith, pray, give witness, and do what is God-pleasing. See, for instance, 1 Peter 2:9: "You are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

**Theology:** Can indicate academic or abstract reflection, but use of the term in this study refers to faithful talk about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, engages in theology when expressing thoughts about God, the church, God in relation to civic life, etc.

**Three estates:** Used to designate the broadest divisions of social hierarchy in Christendom (Christian Europe) from the Middle Ages to early modern Europe. There is some variation in meaning, depending on the time and locale invoked. In Reformation thinking, the three overarching divisions (estates) were identified as the church, the government, and the family (which included all economic functions).

**Two kingdoms:** A traditional theological term from the Reformation regarding the proper distinction of God's activity in the world: through secular means, such as government, versus God's gracious activity in the church. ELCA teaching describes this as God's two ways or two hands rather than as two kingdoms. God's "right hand" conveys the tangible power of God's love and forgiveness to people of faith, which stirs us to forgive others, to express mutual love and care, and to strive for justice. God's "left hand" works through human roles, structures, and institutions to foster the social well-being of the people and the world God creates. The ELCA teaches that God's two ways of governing are both necessary and interrelated. The institutions of government and church are distinct but have appropriate functional interaction.

**Word:** Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom God's message to us as both Law and Gospel reveals God's judgment and mercy. The ELCA constitution holds that the Word is expressed in creation and in the history of Israel but is centered in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are the written Word of God in the sense that they are inspired by God's Spirit speaking through the authors as they record and announce God's revelation centering Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.





## SESSION 4: WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES?

*Discerning the goals of our evolving constitutional democracy.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text***.

### WELCOME

In this study we wrestle with what it means to be disciples of Christ in a democracy—to serve God as citizens, as residents, and as a community of faith. The purpose of today’s session is to better understand our objectives in the U.S. democracy—how the Constitution established our government, how government functions, and what the Constitution has to say about religion and the “separation of church and state.” These are historical and political questions, but we will also examine them from a biblical and theological perspective.

This ELCA study is about the faithful response of the church and its members to God’s power, presence, and calling in government and civic engagement. The ELCA is a church in America, so we invite you to think about issues of U.S. government and civic participation from a biblical and theological point of view.

As in our prior sessions, the topics may reveal differences in what we believe and understand about the goals of our democracy, the purposes of government, and the role of God and God’s people in government and civic life.

### OPENING PRAYER

Creator of all, we thank you for the opportunity to gather in study. Open our minds and hearts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, unite us in faith, hope, and love. Help us to be faithful to the gospel and to walk humbly with you. Grant us your peace as we grow in wisdom and understanding. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>1</sup>If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard

others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4).

### LITANY (Adapted from *This Far by Faith*)

Leader: In our relationships with each other, let us have the same mindset as Christ,

**All: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to use to his advantage.**

Leader: Instead, he made himself nothing, taking on the nature of a servant in human likeness,

**All: And humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.**

Leader: Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name,

**All: That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God. Amen.**

### HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- “God Is Here!,” verses 1, 4 (ELW 526, WOV 719)
- “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service” (ELW 712, LBW 423)
- “Oh, Freedom” (TFF 208)
- “Faith Begins by Letting Go” (ACS 1004)

### PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

With a partner, choose which questions / story prompts to answer, alternating turns as time allows.

1. Consider the beliefs regarding civic engagement and political viewpoints of the people who raised you, whether parents, grandparents, or some other caregiver. Without mentioning your political affiliation, talk about how you either accepted their beliefs as your own or how your beliefs became different from theirs. If you have grown or adolescent children, nieces, or

nephews, what trend do you see in the next generation? Will they hold views similar to yours?

2. What are a few things government provides that you appreciate in your everyday life? (Consider anything from paved roads to controlling air traffic to administering Social Security.)
3. Recall a class on civics or government in high school or even earlier. What do you remember about it? Why did or didn't it provide enough of a foundation for you to become an engaged citizen?

### **Micah 6:6-8:**

<sup>6</sup>“With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” <sup>8</sup>He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

- Those to whom these words were first directed probably liked to think of themselves as right with God because of a checklist of done deeds—including offerings and sacrifice. The calf makes the sacrifice on the altar; our sacrifice is shown through justice, kindness, and humbleness. The wording reflects that it is not always our default manner to live out those ideals. What challenges do you face in living out these ideals in a polarized time?
- These well-known verses don't give much support to public displays of religiosity; instead they push believers to a life of faith lived out in everyday interactions. Consider the culture war battles over displaying the Ten Commandments in public spaces, placing Christmas trees in state capitol buildings, and so on. How might this Scripture inform your stance on such matters?
- Based on this passage and the greater canon of Scripture, what do you think God's expectations for life in community are?

- If this passage were our only directive for forming a government, what would that government look like?

### **POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How has this video changed your understanding of the often-used phrase “separation of church and state”?
2. IF the founders of American democracy could have seen two and a half centuries into the future, what, if anything, do you think they would have done differently as they began their experiment in sovereignty by the people?
3. In a pluralistic society, a Lutheran Christian might campaign for an atheist candidate for religious reasons because that candidate supports legislation on issues a person of faith might prioritize, such as hunger. Given that our country's governing documents were never meant to divorce people's faith from their civic and political engagement, how do you think so many Americans came to misunderstand faith and politics as being separate?
4. Given what you heard in the video and know about Christian principles, are there things that you think can only be, or best be, addressed by government? If yes, why?
5. Consider government officials or others in public life who speak openly about their faith or who base political platforms on a specific set of religious beliefs. How do the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses Scripture, and Lutheran theology inform your opinion on this?
6. When dealing with an individual's participation in the governmental process, such as voting, amendments to the Constitution have always expanded the right to participate (extending it to people of color, women, young adults) and never contracted it. On Christian principles, has the Constitution gotten that right? Do you think that there are challenges to political participation now, and how do you believe those should be addressed?

7. Consider the First Amendment’s religious clauses. How might our country be different if the government were not mandated to be secular, if it had the power to establish a state religion? What does it mean to you to live in a pluralistic society, in which government cannot favor a single religion over other religions and all people may express their faiths—or no faith—as they so choose? How do these ideas harmonize or conflict with your understanding of Scripture and Lutheran theology?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. If you’ve arrived at a new understanding of how our governing documents were formed, how might that affect your faith life in the civic and political realms?
2. How might you navigate disagreements with other Christians on how to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God when our differing convictions spring from common values?

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HYSK2NF> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### PROMPTS FOR ACTION OUTSIDE THE STUDY GROUP

- Use the Session 4 Going Deeper Handout for personal reading or group discussion after reading the ELCA social message “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy.” [ELCA.org/socialmessages](https://elca.org/socialmessages)
- Read and discuss the United States Constitution. [constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution](https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution)
- Read and discuss the Articles of Confederation. [www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation](https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation)
- Read and discuss The Federalist Papers. [guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text](https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text)

### WEBSITES

Visit [iCivics.org](https://www.icivics.org) for civics education resources for students and families, and Civics Flash Cards (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) to test your knowledge of U.S. history and government.

### BOOKS

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Cleve, Van George, *We Have Not a Government: The Articles of Confederation and the Road to the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

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Pasewark, Kyle A., and Garrett E. Paul, *The Emphatic Christian Center: Reforming Christian Political Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

## GLOSSARY (Note: Some words are used only in the video.)

**Civic engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public/civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for governmental leaders.

**Establishment Clause:** The first clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states that government “shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion.” This means that government cannot establish a state or national religion or impose any form of worship or devotion upon its citizens.

**Free Exercise Clause:** The second phrase in the First Amendment, regarding government’s relationship to religious practice under the Constitution. Unlike the Establishment Clause, this phrase focuses on the relationship between faith and public/civic life. The first clause, prohibiting establishment of a state religion, clears the ground for the faithful to determine their own best way of exercising faith in their public life.

**Politics:** From the Greek term polis, for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about who gets what, when, where, and how to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good.

**Separation of church and state:** Usually shorthand for the Establishment Clause that forbids state-sponsored religion. The meaning of the phrase is contested. For example, many people, including religious people, believe it means that religious convictions and politics should flow in completely separate streams. (See “Quietism.”) The ELCA constitution, on the other hand, endorses institutional separation with functional interaction and argues that the church as a civic body should avoid partisanship but engage in civic life, because God calls people of faith to join God’s activity there.



## SESSION 5: WHAT'S FAITH-BASED LIVING GOT TO DO WITH CIVIC LIFE?

*Discerning the callings of discipleship, both corporate and individual.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text.***

### WELCOME

In previous sessions we addressed why we consider our calling as Christians to include ***civic engagement*** and participation in government. In the fourth session we explored how the U.S. form of government opens up that kind of engagement through the First Amendment. Today's session addresses the actions we as individuals and as a church might seek for the common good, alongside others in the public sphere. Differing experiences and beliefs mean we as God's people may end up taking different individual action in striving for what we consider the common good for our communities and society. However, it is still our joy and challenge to discern together, seeing new perspectives and encouraging each other to take action. In response to God's mercy, we are called to serve God through love and service to neighbor, including in civic engagement.

### OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, you call your people to honor those in authority. Help us elect trustworthy leaders, participate in wise decisions for our common life, and serve our neighbors in local communities. Bless the leaders of our land, that we may be at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 77)

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>14</sup>"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

### LITANY (Based on Psalm 67)

Leader: O God, let your way be known upon Earth,

**All: And your saving health among all nations.**

Leader: Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

**All: For you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations.**

Leader: People of God, let your light shine forth,

**All: That God's reign of peace and justice may flourish.**

### HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- "This Little Light of Mine" (ELW 677, TFF 65)
- "All Who Love and Serve Your City" (ELW 724, LBW 436)
- "We Come to the Hungry Feast" (ELW 479, WOV 766)
- "Lord, You Give the Great Commission" (ELW 579, WOV 756)
- "Wind and Cold Roar"/"Corre el viento" (ACS 1010)

### PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

1. Share three things most central to your identity.
2. Share, if you know, where your ancestors came from (whether they were native to this soil or immigrated from another continent by choice or force) and what challenges they faced regarding the freedom to worship God and live out their faith.
3. Do friends, neighbors, co-workers—people outside of church—know you are a person of faith? Is it important to you that they do or don't know? How might someone know of your faith if it was unspoken?

## Martin Luther on the Eighth Commandment

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

<sup>260</sup>Therefore this commandment is given first of all that every one shall help his neighbor to secure his rights, and not allow them to be hindered or twisted, but shall promote and strictly maintain them, no matter whether he be judge or witness, and let it pertain to whatsoever it will. ...

<sup>285</sup>Thus we have now the sum and general understanding of this commandment, to wit, that no one do any injury with the tongue to his neighbor, whether friend or foe, nor speak evil of him, no matter whether it be true or false, unless it be done by commandment or for his reformation, but that every one employ his tongue and make it serve for the best of every one else, to cover up his neighbor's sins and infirmities, excuse them, palliate and garnish them with his own reputation. <sup>286</sup>The chief reason for this should be the one which Christ alleges in the Gospel, in which He comprehends all commandments respecting our neighbor, Matt. 7:12: Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. ...

<sup>290</sup>There are comprehended therefore in this commandment quite a multitude of good works which please God most highly, and bring abundant good and blessing, if only the blind world and the false saints would recognize them. For there is nothing on or in entire man which can do both greater and more extensive good or harm in spiritual and in temporal matters than the tongue, though it is the least and feeblest member." (Luther, Martin, *The Book of Concord: The Large Catechism*, [bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/](http://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/))

- How would you explain why Luther connected not bearing false witness with the common good?
- How might Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment shape your understanding of civic engagement and participation?
- What are some concrete ways that everyday civic engagement can help a neighbor, as Luther wrote, secure rights, not allowing them to be hindered or twisted?

- How do you draw the line between speaking out against injustice and not speaking ill of friend or foe? What kinds of wrongs are you likely to speak up about in the spirit of reformation that Luther noted?

### Key Ideas in the Video:

- Christian discipleship is an active call to love our neighbors, live in community, and seek the common good.
- This call to discipleship is integral to our identity as children of God.
- Quietism is a passive acceptance of the social status quo. It is not faithful because it allows the powerful to exploit those with less power.
- ***Christian nationalism*** is a political ideology and is neither faithful to Christ nor patriotic. It idealizes and advocates the fusion of certain Christian views with loyalty to one's country and encourages enforcing upon the nation a particular and harsh understanding of certain Christian principles.
- Faithful civic participation lies between the two extremes of quietism and Christian nationalism. It includes participation in the political realm, such as voting or serving in public office. But it also includes nonpolitical civic engagement such as working with others to make one's community better for all.
- Christian discipleship encourages activity in the political realm because it is exercised in everyday life. Christians are called to civic engagement and political participation as a means to express our love of God by actively loving our neighbor. We do not do this to make God love us or to earn our way into heaven, but because God loves us first and includes us in God's work for justice and peace.

### POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the importance attached to a political candidate's religious identity or lack thereof has changed in your lifetime?
2. Lutheran identity, which emphasizes salvation through God's grace, has sometimes inadvertently emphasized that because we can't do anything to earn salvation, we shouldn't do anything at all in

response to God's love. How does or doesn't the experience of being freed from earning your salvation inspire you to discipleship? Are there times you would simply rather be told what you have to do?

3. In our current political context, what issues are likely to drive Lutherans into the trap of quietism?
4. How would you explain voting and running for office as acts of discipleship to a nonreligious friend?
5. Christian nationalism clearly manipulates Jesus' teachings. Why do you think we have seen a surge in Christian nationalism in recent years?
6. How can Christians appropriately support political movements and legislation in line with biblical teachings about care for the vulnerable, feeding the hungry, and so on, without becoming partisan?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. There are many arenas where religious and government entities and funding interact: chaplains in the military, public hospitals, and police departments; immigration services; disaster relief; adoption and foster care; hunger relief; and so on. Most of us grumble from time to time about paying taxes, but what are a couple things funded by taxes that are important to you as a person of faith? Why do or don't you consider those things when paying taxes?
2. Quietism can be found in churches whose leadership fears the congregation will get upset that their church is "being too political." How can you appropriately encourage your church leadership and members to be active in the world and address wrongs done to neighbors?

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/D8VJLMZ> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### PROMPTS FOR ACTION OUTSIDE THE STUDY GROUP

- Join the ELCA's advocacy efforts. Start here: [ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy/Get-Involved](https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy/Get-Involved)
- Visit ELCA's advocacy resources at [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy)
- Join or create a social justice group in your congregation to help guide your members toward increased social engagement. Decide together on a handful of issues to become involved in.
- Invite your synod's Lutheran state public policy staff to host a forum or preach during worship to inform members of the advocacy work being done.

### WEBSITES

Repairers of the Breach is a nonpartisan not-for-profit organization that seeks to build a moral agenda rooted in a framework that uplifts the deepest moral and constitutional values to redeem the heart and soul of our country and addresses the moral public concerns of our faith traditions regarding how our society treats "the least of these." [breachrepairers.org](https://www.breachrepairers.org)

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Tranvik, Mark D., *Martin Luther and the Called Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016).

## GLOSSARY (Note: Some words may only be used in the video.)

**Christian nationalism:** A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of certain Christian views with American civic life. This political ideology, whether explicit or not, includes the beliefs that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired and enjoys godly status, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S., that the nation holds a special status in God's eyes, and that good Americans must hold Christian beliefs. Proponents range from those who believe the U.S. should be declared a Christian nation (approximately 21% of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, anti-democratic, or ganglike. The symbols and ideology of Christian nationalism were widely evident during the Jan. 6, 2021, attempt to throw out certified U.S. election results.

**Civic engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public and civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for governmental leaders.

**Partisanship:** Strong and sometimes blind adherence to a specific party, group, faction, set of beliefs, or set of personal characteristics.

**Politics:** From the Greek term *polis*, for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish.

**Quietism:** As used here, describes a passive, withdrawn attitude or practice toward public or civic affairs. This withdrawal may be intentional policy or simply a practice, but both are characterized by quiet acceptance of the civic status quo and avoidance of political engagement. This approach to public life has a long track record among many Lutherans even though it was not evident in the Reformation period.





# SESSION 6: HOW DO WE GO IN PEACE TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD IN CIVIC LIFE?

*Discerning the callings of discipleship, both corporate and individual.*

Please note: The first use of terms found in the Glossary are identified by ***bolded, italicized and underlined text***.

## WELCOME

The foundation of our Lutheran identity is built upon the understanding that salvation is a gift of God not earned by our good works, political rightness, or moral purity. Secure in God’s love and grace, we are then freed to live our lives in response to that love, in worship and service to God and God’s creation.

Worship is the starting point for our faithful response. In worship, we relearn that we are the body of Christ, that we are at work in the world as the hands, feet, and mouth of our Lord. We believe God is present not just in our buildings where we worship but in all corners of the world—and within us, as well. Therefore it is logical that our faith will be lived outside our church walls, including in our civic engagement, as we seek to live out our baptismal promises to “strive for justice and peace in all the world.”

What are your reasons for coming to worship?

## OPENING PRAYER (Adapted from *All Creation Sings* and ancient prayer.)

Sovereign God, your Son, Jesus, lived within the structures of society. Empower us to be courageous disciples and responsible citizens. Grant that our life in the public realm be grounded in love for our neighbors, care for the vulnerable, and respect for the common life we share. Keep us working and praying for the day when your justice will roll down like waters and your righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Replenish our strength and stir up

our hope as we look for signs of your coming reign. Grant your church wisdom and boldness in times of quiet and times of trouble. Fill us with the peace that passes understanding—the peace of Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

## SCRIPTURE

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27).

## LITANY

Leader: People of God, we are called to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

**All: Yet we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.**

Leader: Let us turn our hearts toward those who hunger in any way, that all may know your care.

**All: We pray for peace and justice in the world, the nations and those in authority, the poor and oppressed.**

Leader: God, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**All: Now raise us up as the body of Christ for the world. Amen.**

## HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (ELW 841, TFF 296, LBW 562)
- “Go to the World” (ACS 991)
- “The Church of Christ, in Every Age” (ELW 729, LBW 433)
- “God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind” (ELW 400)

## PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

1. Tell a story about a time you became friends with someone whom you previously disliked or who held opposing views on a significant issue. How did it come to be? What surprised you?
2. Describe how it feels in your body when you are having a heated discussion with someone about a polarizing issue.
3. Consider your deepest longings for the future of humanity. If you could gift one thing to the generation not yet born, what would it be and why?
4. How does coming to in-person worship shape you and help you face what the week may hold?

### Luke 10:25-37: "The Parable of the Good Samaritan"

<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>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.' <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

- The parable of the Good Samaritan would have been shocking to its original audience. The Samaritans and Jews had a long-standing hostility that grew from political and religious differences. Telling a story with the hero being Samaritan would have flipped all understanding of "them" versus "us." What might such shocking kindness and compassion from "them" toward "us" look like in our country?
- Jesus' telling of this story surely invites us to be vulnerable for the sake of others, especially showing hospitality to enemies, those with whom we have historically lived in opposition. At the risk of sounding naïve, consider some of the most hated people in recent American history. Why do or don't you think the terrible events of 9/11 could have been avoided had the attackers had been invited into relationship with the people they hated?
- How does it change your potentially hostile engagements with others to hear that the answer to "Who is my neighbor" is "the one you want to avoid or the one who hates you"?
- Being followers of Christ naturally leads us to challenge the cultural and political factions that can box us in and divide us: we are not "red" or "blue" but God's children. In that freedom, we don't have to always like each other or agree on much beyond our basic understanding of faith in God. We don't have to restrict our message or efforts in the world fainthearted positions that won't offend anyone. What does it mean to you that you are free to stand up for what you believe is right through your faith-based lens?

- A recent study found that, in churches, synagogues, and mosques, there is a higher-than-average rate of friendships formed across disparities in income. That is in keeping with religious belief lived out in practice. Those same countercultural instincts can also help bridge other differences, including ideological and political polarization. With that in mind, how do you think our church can be a model for civil civic engagement?
- What will Jesus' command to "Go and do likewise" look like in your civic life?

WORSHIP COMPONENT	WORSHIP ELEMENT * **	EXPLANATION	HOW THIS MAY RELATE TO OUR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
GATHERING	Invocation	Calling on God's presence in our gathering.	
	Congession and Forgiveness	Asking for forgiveness for when we have sinned and fallen short as individuals or in the structures of society. Living in a spirit of humility and forgiveness; letting go of resentment.	
WORD	Liturgy: Kyrie, Hymn of Praise, Prayer of the Day	"Kyrie eleison" means "Lord, have mercy," a cry for help. The Hymn of Praise gives thanks to God. The Prayer of the Day or collect typically summarizes of the theme of the readings.	
	Scripture Readings	God's word from prophets, letters, poetry, law, gospel, wisdom sayings, and accounts of joys and struggles in the early church.	
	Sermon	Proclamation, explanation, and application of God's word to everyday life.	
	Creed	Statement of faith and grounding in our shared belief.	
	Prayers of the People	Prayers are directed to life in the church and in society. Prayers give thanks and seek healing, faith, inspiration, wisdom, and comfort.	
	Hymns (in all components)	Voices are raised together, expressing all our joys and pains.	
	MEAL	Sharing the Peace	A sign of our unity, shared with all people.
Offering/Offertory		Gifts to God that support the church and its work in society.	
Lord's Prayer		Taught to disciples by Jesus, the prayer invites us to approach God with familiarity as we pray for our needs and forgiveness.	

	Preface/Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy"), Words of Institution, Distribution	We gather all people around Jesus' table. Eucharistic hospitality is practiced, affirming that all people are loved by God.	
	Post-communion Canticle ("Thank the Lord") and Prayer of Thanksgiving	We thank God for the grace we have been given.	
SENDING	Blessing and Dismissal	We are sent in thanksgiving for service in God's world.	

\*Not an exhaustive list.

\*\* Though the elements may be similar in Lutheran churches across the globe as well as in other Christian assemblies, there is rightfully much diversity in their expression. Worship of God is naturally shaped by the culture and context of worshipers.

### POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you listen to the words of the prayers of the people, you might notice that some of the things prayed for are tall orders: peace, the end of suffering, for all to be fed, and so on. Why do you think this is important?
2. Hatred, animosity, and division have always existed in the world, including in the time and space Jesus was born into, lived in, and was hung on a cross in. How does the current time feel different from other eras of your life?
3. Our faith is lived out in the world, so when the world or our country has problems and challenges, we have problems and challenges too. If you were a pastor, how would you decide which potentially divisive topics to address in a sermon? Should there be anything churches cannot talk about? How do you react when you disagree with something said in prayers, biblical readings, or a sermon?
4. As the video points out, there have been many examples of churchgoers who engaged in very un-Christlike activities that harmed others. How do you gauge where to draw the line between respecting differences of opinion and condoning opinions and actions that are hateful, dangerous, or threatening to our democracy?
5. Part of our baptismal calling is to "strive for justice and peace in all the world." Most people don't automatically relate their faith to their interactions on social media. How do you see your faith and this calling lived out in your online presence?
6. Repeating inaccurate, polarizing news is a form of the false witness named in the Eighth Commandment. How do you think churches should address the challenge of modern technology that has likely contributed to people's rising mistrust of news media and each other? How does your discipleship factor into your news media choices?
7. Advocating for issues (especially those connected to biblical commands that relate to hunger, justice, economic insecurity, refugees, and so on), being an informed and active voter, serving in elected office, and praying for our elected officials can all be considered acts of discipleship. How do you see each of these examples of civic participation as arenas in which to reflect God's love and grace in a complicated world? How do you relate them to what we see, do, and hear in worship? Why do you think civic participation as it relates to our discipleship as followers of Christ has often been ignored or disregarded?

“Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another?” (Malachi 2:10 NKJV).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What ideas do you have for fostering productive dialogue in this congregation as a model for the ministry of reconciliation?
2. How do you understand your belief and faith in God to be intertwined with your civic participation? How has this study changed your understanding of the civic engagement of the Christian?

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DL69SHR> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### PROMPTS FOR ACTION OUTSIDE THE STUDY GROUP

- Read about the “One Small Step” movement from the creator of StoryCorps, Inc. Create a “Small Steps” group in your congregation that meets periodically, with the goal of forming friendships among people of opposing viewpoints as a model for bridging divides.
- Form current-events small groups that meet (perhaps over a meal) for moral deliberation and considering different responses to current societal issues. Consider partnering with another faith group or denomination to enrich interaction among diverse groups.

## ARTICLES

“The Church in the Public Space. A Study Document of the Lutheran World Federation” (2021), [www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-church-public-space-study-document-lutheran-world-federation](http://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-church-public-space-study-document-lutheran-world-federation).

Ninke, Rebecca, “Loving Your Neighbor, Your Enemy, and God,” Sparkhouse Blog, Nov. 3, 2020, <https://blog.wearesparkhouse.org/loving-your-neighbor-your-enemy-and-god>.

## WEBSITES

The “One Small Step” Project from StoryCorps—coming together in conversations to feel less torn apart:

<https://storycorps.org/discover/onesmallstep/>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s “Publicly Engaged Church” page:

[ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church](http://ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church)

## BOOKS

Brubaker, David R., *When the Center Does Not Hold: Leading in an Age of Polarization* (Fortress Press, 2019).

Erlander, Daniel, *Baptized, We Live: Lutheranism As a Way of Life* (Fortress Press, 2020).