

INTRODUCTION

A Shared Foundation

As the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) encompasses major geographical, cultural, ideological and generational differences. We therefore ground our advocacy in our shared foundations: Scripture, the Lutheran theological tradition and, above all, our baptismal identity as belonging to God in the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Community of Moral Deliberation

In our call to public witness, the ELCA is a community of moral deliberation, patient in adopting new positions and careful to listen, study, discuss and pray when taking public stances. This process of deliberation and discernment leads to the ELCA denominational social teaching, which includes social statements, social messages and resolutions.

ELCA social statements are developed over the course of at least five years, with multiple rounds of rigorous input and public feedback. They require a two-thirds vote of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly for adoption. These social statements speak to important issues of public concern from a Lutheran perspective.

A Call to Public Witness

Our church affirms that our witness in society, as Christians and as Lutherans, is an important part of our call to discipleship. Because Lutheran theology asserts that governments exist to help advance the common good, ELCA social teaching documents specifically highlight points of intersection between our faith-based values and public policy.

Our public witness does not aim to advance any political party, nor does it reflect a poll of our membership; instead the priorities below and all policy advocacy of the ELCA churchwide organization derive directly from, and must be consistent with, ELCA social teaching documents.

Finally, when we witness publicly to the values embodied in our social teaching, we endeavor to speak from the experiences of our ministries and through the voices of our members and our neighbors, near and far, alongside whom we walk in relationships of accompaniment.

Contents

Introduction	1
Civic Engagement	2
Policy Priorities	3
Economic Policy	4
Civil Rights Policy	5
Environment and Energy Policy	6
Migration Policy	7
International Policy	8
Middle East and North Africa Policy	9

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As we in the Witness in Society office of the ELCA identify priorities for federal advocacy each year, we begin by reflecting on what civic engagement looks like in Christian advocacy and ministry. By civic engagement we mean working, through word and deed, to make a difference in the shared life of our communities and our country, and developing the knowledge, skills, values and motivation needed to make that difference.

Jesus commands us to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39) and even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36) and demands humility in our moral judgements of others (Matthew 7:3; Luke 6:37-42). Freed by God's grace in the waters of our baptism, we preach and humbly struggle to practice these values in our public witness and our shared denominational life.

These values inform the “what” of the policy choices and issue-framing in the pages that follow, and they call us to a particular “how” of advocacy: specific practices that are independent of any policy area and applicable across all of them. In our public witness, we seek to:

Facilitate depolarizing conversations and relationships.

- Highlight models and resources for depolarizing interpersonal exchanges; engage in advocacy with this lens; foster healthy community conversations toward the common good.
- Encourage and pursue bipartisan approaches and practice respectful engagement with all.

Foster cultural and political pluralism.

- Support cross-ideological and cross-cultural dialogue and tolerance for disagreement; encourage our church and our country to seek tools for living together in a pluralist society.
- Support Lutheran communities, ministries and individuals as they develop civic relationships that build trust amid deep and consequential differences.

Support Lutheran participation in civic life and public witness.

- Activate, energize and equip ELCA members, ministries and clergy for active civic engagement and public witness with policymakers, both locally and in Washington, D.C.

Honor and pray for our elected officials and public servants.

- Pray regularly for those in positions of authority, as human beings and as people working for the common good.
- Honor and show care for all public servants by treating them respectfully and speaking up for their fair and respectful treatment by others.

“The witness of this church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and for the Gospel. Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society. It is in grateful response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ that this church carries out its responsibility for the well-being of society and the environment.”

—ELCA social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, pp. 1-2

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS

POLICY PRIORITIES

Biannual Policy Priorities

The following pages lay out the policy priorities discerned for ELCA federal advocacy during the 119th Congress, which convened in Washington, D.C., in January 2025 and will end in January 2027. The policy priorities headings in the following pages summarize the broad actions we are asking our government and leaders to take, followed by bullet points describing further details. Because specific bill numbers, amendments, regulations and executive actions change rapidly, we have not listed those in this document but instead will provide updates as policies develop. To receive such updates, please sign up for the ELCA Advocacy Network at [ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://elca.org/advocacy/signup).

ELCA social teaching also covers a broad range of topics beyond those embodied in the biannual policy priorities below. The ELCA supports policies in line with the full breadth of ELCA social teaching. However, the biannual ELCA Federal Policy Priorities chosen for the 119th Congress represent the intersection of our social teaching with the policy areas in which we expect to see federal policy action and opportunities for impactful advocacy in the next two years.

If there is a policy area that is important to you but that you do not see specified, please reach out to the ELCA Witness in Society's D.C. office at washingtonoffice@elca.org. We will be happy to answer your questions or receive your input.

Overview

Economic Policy

- Support poor and working families.
- Expand the supply of affordable housing.
- Advance a just and sustainable tax code.
- Reduce bureaucratic and administrative burden.
- Care for farmers, hungry neighbors, and creation.

Civil Rights Policy

- Prevent discrimination.
- Protect religious liberty for all.
- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups.
- Recognize and address historical injustices.
- Support mental health of high-risk groups.
- Uphold constitutional rights and promote good governance.

Environment & Energy Policy

- Pursue pragmatic climate solutions.
- Support impacted communities.
- Promote community health.
- Prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

Migration Policy

- Ensure stable families and communities.
- Maintain a safe and orderly border.
- Oppose mass deportation.
- Respect human dignity in immigration enforcement.
- Protect vulnerable women, children, refugees and asylum seekers.

International Policy

- Restore and support humanitarian aid.
- Defend human rights and religious freedom.
- Advance women and girls' rights and equality.
- Help prevent conflicts and build peace.
- Model moral consistency in foreign policy.

Middle East & North Africa Policy

- Insist on equal rights and safety for all in the Holy Land.
- Stabilize the Middle East and North Africa region.
- Protect civilian life.
- Defend freedom of religion and religious minorities.

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



ECONOMIC POLICY

With Christians around the world, we pray that God will “give us today our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Following Martin Luther’s explanation of the Lord’s Prayer in his Large Catechism, we understand that the institutions of shared economic life are a central means through which God gives us each day this daily bread.

Support poor and working families.

- Protect core social safety-net programs; ensure funding for Medicaid, Medicare, and hunger and homelessness programs; avoid cuts to benefits and ensure that they keep up with the real cost of inflation.
- Work to break cycles of generational poverty by promoting pathways that help people move from economic instability to sufficient livelihoods; increase economic opportunity through job creation, education, job training and apprenticeship programs.

Expand the supply of affordable housing.

- Make housing easier and faster to build by simplifying and reducing burdensome regulations; create processes for both fast construction and protection of the environment and communities.
- Promote equal housing access for low-income and poor neighbors through mechanisms such as tax incentives, voucher programs, direct funding and access to credit.

Advance a just and sustainable tax code.

- Set taxation levels relative to people’s ability to pay and to the benefits they derive from our economic system; support tax policies that prioritize families in need and small businesses.
- Move toward sustainable government funding through a wise, long-term balance of revenue and spending; ensure that revenues and government staffing are sufficient to meet the United States’ shared commitment to our poorest and most vulnerable neighbors.

*“Empowered by God,
we continue to act, pray,
and hope that through
economic life there truly will
be sufficient, sustainable
livelihood for all.”*

—ELCA social statement,
*Sufficient, Sustainable
Livelihood for All*, p. 18

Reduce bureaucratic and administrative burden.

- Simplify and streamline access to government social safety-net services; reduce redundancy and modernize systems to make transacting with the government easy, clear and quick.
- Reduce bureaucratic paperwork and compliance requirements in applications and renewal processes; ensure accountability through the least burdensome and most respectful means.
- Ensure sufficient and effective staffing to effectively deliver government services.

Care for farmers, hungry neighbors and creation.

- Reauthorize a Farm Bill that provides food for hungry neighbors at home and abroad, sustains healthy rural and farming communities, includes people of all backgrounds in the farm economy and faithfully stewards creation to feed future generations.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Federal budget, Farm Bill, Tax Cuts & Jobs Act

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



CIVIL RIGHTS POLICY

Beginning with the creation of all human beings in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and culminating in Christ's sacrifice, poured out for all people (Matthew 26:28), Scripture teaches that the divisions and status hierarchies of the world are completely upended by God's love and righteousness. In the words of the apostle Paul, "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Prevent discrimination.

- Support the legal protections of nondiscrimination policy with focus on equal rights and equal dignity for women, LGBTQ people, and people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Protect religious liberty for all.

- Uphold the free exercise of religion for all religious groups and oppose the establishment of a national religion in the United States.
- Protect the practices of care and mercy that flow from religious conviction, especially serving, sheltering and welcoming the vulnerable; prevent government intrusion into houses of worship and sacred spaces.

Improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

- Build and safeguard an educational system that provides affordable, quality education to everyone, with attention to sufficient funding for disadvantaged schools and students.
- Reduce health disparities experienced by low-income people and racial minorities while maintaining research that illuminates trends in differential outcomes by group.

Recognize and address historical injustices.

- Establish the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies; respect Indigenous land rights and tribal sovereignty.
- Reduce mass incarceration and decrease racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Support mental health of high-risk groups.

- Address rising mental illness and suicide rates, including for youth, people in rural areas and high-risk populations such as LGBTQ people, middle-aged men and veterans.
- Improve funding, accessibility and quality of mental health and suicide prevention initiatives; protect youth from harmful effects of social media and digital technology.

Uphold constitutional rights and promote good governance.

- Defend freedoms that are derived from equal human dignity and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, including freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly, petition and the vote.
- Defend the related, democratically-derived civil rights to freely protest, unionize, donate, boycott and engage in shareholder advocacy.
- Preserve the good governance that flows from the constitutional system of checks and balances and the separation of powers; prevent state targeting of political opponents and prohibit use of the military against civilian populations.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Executive orders on nondiscrimination policy and the Department of Education.

"We are torn between becoming the people God calls us to be and remaining the people we are, barricaded behind old walls of hostility. The social, economic, and political dimensions of the crisis are acute, and indications of it abound."

—ELCA social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* (1993), p. 3

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY POLICY

Rooted in Genesis 2:15, our role within creation is to steward what God has created and called good. This gift of responsibility for the earth dignifies humanity without debasing the rest of God's awe-inspiring creation.

Pursue pragmatic climate solutions.

- Support streamlined permitting and other reform measures to accelerate renewable energy deployment and increase energy security.
- Safeguard the historic climate-mitigation investments of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Support impacted communities.

- Highlight the impact of environment and energy policy on workers, especially energy and manufacturing industry workers and farmers.
- Lift up the voices of neighbors heavily affected by pollution and climate change, especially those from low-income areas, poorer countries and Indigenous communities.

"We serve and keep the earth, trusting its bounty can be sufficient for all, and sustainable."

—ELCA social statement,
Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice (1993), p. 6

Promote community health.

- Reduce pollution of land, air and water; protect communities most vulnerable to the health impacts of pollution.
- Conserve wilderness and beautiful natural environments for current and future generations to enjoy; honor and protect culturally and religiously significant land.

Prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

- Fund and improve the effectiveness of federal disaster response; better equip communities and churches to protect and serve survivors of disasters.
- Develop systems of preparation for and response to increased natural disasters.
- Build disaster- and climate-resilient infrastructure; support communities in adapting to the negative effects of climate change.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Clean energy permitting; implementation of climate provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



MIGRATION POLICY

Rooted in our experiences as immigrants and refugees, the Lutheran Church in the United States has welcomed and advocated for immigrants and refugees for over 80 years. Our own history reminds us of God's command to ancient Israel to "love the alien as yourself" (Leviticus 19:34).

Ensure stable families and communities.

- Prohibit family separation in detention or deportation; prioritize family reunification.
- Restore sensitive-location protections, especially for churches, schools and hospitals.
- Avoid policies and practices that destabilize, disrupt or divide mixed-status families.
- Make legal status determinations and enforcement actions consistent, clear and fair.

Maintain a safe and orderly border.

- Enforce U.S. borders consistently, humanely and fairly.
- Create efficient and orderly systems for processing border arrivals; ensure due process while swiftly clearing adjudication backlogs.
- Ensure physical safety of citizens, migrants and border communities.
- Pursue multilateral collaboration and cooperation on migration management; work with other countries to address root causes of mass migration.

Oppose mass deportation.

- Oppose the detention and deportation of tens of millions of people.
- Defer removal of and provide pathways to legal status for long-standing residents with close community ties.
- Prioritize resources toward keeping communities safe by targeting enforcement and removal operations toward individuals convicted of serious crimes.
- Reject militarized response to migration and prohibit use of the military for detention and enforcement; oppose policy based on a violent invasion paradigm.

Respect human dignity in immigration enforcement.

- Treat migrants humanely and respectfully in immigration and border policy; ensure safety, respect for human rights, humane conditions, and due process in detention and deportation.
- Reject dehumanizing rhetoric and negative stereotyping of immigrants in policymaking.

Protect vulnerable women, children, refugees and asylum seekers.

- Reinstate policies to welcome, support and integrate refugees; restore funding for refugee resettlement; maintain protections for asylum-seekers and efficiently process applications for asylum.
- Uphold policy to temporarily welcome and protect migrants fleeing humanitarian and political crises, especially Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED).
- Show specific care for children and unaccompanied minors in the immigration system including through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); protect women, girls and children from exploitation, trafficking and domestic and sexual violence; ensure that victims can safely report crimes and seek medical care.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Executive orders on detention and deportation; refugee and asylum protections.

"Our church ... has a history of hospitality for refugees. Following World War II, when one out of every six Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced person, Lutherans, with the participation of 6,000 congregations, resettled some 57,000 refugees in the United States."

—ELCA social message, "Immigration" (1998), p. 3

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Formed by the Sermon on the Mount, we share with the church of Jesus Christ in all times and places the calling to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Locally and globally, we care for Jesus by caring for “the least of these,” with whom he identified: strangers, prisoners and those who are hungry, thirsty, naked or sick (Matthew 25:35-40).

Restore and support humanitarian aid.

- Ensure that Congress appropriates and the executive branch distributes funds for lifesaving global health programs.
- Protect and strengthen foreign aid programs that reduce extreme poverty and hunger; enhance U.S. international food and nutrition programs authorized in the Farm Bill.
- Provide emergency support to countries facing natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

Defend human rights and religious freedom.

- Deter and interrupt human rights violations, with particular attention to civilian deaths and destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- Uphold globally the freedom to practice one’s religion; defend the rights of religious and ethnic minorities; maintain key international institutions and U.S. infrastructure for promoting international religious freedom.
- Use a human rights framework as the basis for U.S. foreign policy.

Advance women’s and girls’ rights and equality.

- Promote women’s equality around the world by protecting existing U.S. programs to encourage women’s economic participation, preserve or increase their access to health care, educate them in youth and shield them from gender-based violence.

Help prevent conflicts and build peace.

- Continue U.S. investment in international conflict prevention; actively engage in diplomacy to end wars; recognize the need for equal justice in crafting treaties and ceasefires to ensure durable peace agreements.
- Use foreign aid as a key tool for long-term peace-building; promote international economic development and protection of human rights to reduce wars and forced migration.

Model moral consistency in foreign policy.

- Align U.S. foreign policy with the values of democracy and freedom and the principles of equal human dignity and the value of all human life; apply the same moral and legal standards to allies, adversaries and enemies alike.
- Follow U.S. law in all foreign policy; uphold international law and institutions such as the United Nations.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Funding and staffing of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); reauthorization of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

“We affirm that our nation has responsibility to contribute a portion of its wealth to people in poorer nations through effective economic assistance. Assistance should come in the form of both humanitarian aid needed to relieve the consequences of disasters and development assistance that contributes to improvements in the quality of life in developing economies.”

—ELCA social statement, *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), p.16

ELCA FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA POLICY

As Christians, we care especially for the people in the lands walked by Jesus in his life on earth and our companion church the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Moreover, Jesus lived his entire life under political oppression, military occupation and the threat of violence (Luke 2; Mark 18; John 18-19). Keeping Christ in our hearts, we advocate for all persecuted or endangered people of the Middle East and North Africa region.

Insist on equal rights and safety for all in the Holy Land.

- Secure durable safety from both state and nonstate violence for all people of the Holy Land, regardless of religion, race or ethnicity.
- Categorically oppose forced resettlement or population expulsion; facilitate postwar return of displaced Israelis and Palestinians; honor Palestinian land rights; prevent settlement or annexation of Palestinian territory, demolition of Palestinian homes and seizure of Palestinian property; continue to condemn settler violence.
- Recognize and support Palestinian self-determination; uplift and protect the Palestinian civic and political engagement necessary for a durable political solution; end political detention, child detention and indefinite detention without cause.
- Respect and protect equal basic rights (including rights to access water and electricity and to move and work freely), freedom to construct and repair housing, and unobstructed access to education and health care.
- Continue U.S. support of the Augusta Victoria Hospital and the wider East Jerusalem Hospital Network.

“When the Church fulfills the mandates of its divine calling, it helps in word and deed to create an environment conducive to peace. When the Church forsakes these mandates, it also fails to serve earthly peace. Through faithfulness in its life and activities as a community for peace, the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit becomes a presence for peace that disturbs, reconciles, serves, and deliberates.”

—ELCA social statement, *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), p. 4

Stabilize the Middle East and North Africa region.

- Support negotiations to end current wars and armed conflicts and to ensure the release of all captives, civilians and political prisoners.
- Ensure that near-term, lifesaving aid — including food, water and medical care — reaches civilian populations.
- Stabilize war-torn countries and territories through support for postwar rebuilding of homes, churches, hospitals, roads, schools and systems of food, water and power.
- Prevent future wars and armed conflicts by resolving root causes of conflicts.

Protect civilian life.

- Pressure all governments to reduce civilian casualties and prohibit the targeting of civilian populations in armed conflict; denounce torture and the unjust imprisonment of civilians.
- Prevent destruction of homes, houses of worship and vital civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, roads and schools; ensure access to food, water and power during conflicts; protect the means of economic livelihood.
- Use U.S. influence to challenge adversaries and allies alike who abuse human rights; hold violators accountable.

Defend freedom of religion and religious minorities.

- Advance the free practice of religion throughout the Middle East and North Africa region, including for minorities; ensure freedom of worship and unhindered access to houses of worship and holy sites for people of all faiths, with special emphasis on those in the Holy Land.
- Intervene to stop violent attacks on religious minority populations and religious sites.
- Preserve a Christian presence in the lands of Christ’s birth, life and ministry, with particular attention to our companion church the ELCJHL; highlight the presence and importance of Christian minorities throughout the Middle East and North Africa region.

Key legislation and policy in 2025: Funding and staffing of USAID; long-term peace plan for the Holy Land.



@ELCAadvocacy

Be part of the ELCA Advocacy Network! [ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://elca.org/advocacy/signup)