

# ELCAvotes Bible Study: Voting Rights Today

[A reading from Isaiah 58<sup>2</sup>](#)

## Prayer

*Gracious Creator, we ask for peace in this sacred space where we have gathered as ones who are bound together. We are bound together by the sacrifice that your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, has given and gave to us and all of creation out of love; with the common thread that weaves into the core of our being through love; and finally at the table, with good food, soul food, where we are empowered to go out beyond our comfort zones, unabashedly spreading the gospel of mercy, grace and peace. Amen.*

## Opening hymn: I want Jesus to walk with me, ELW 325

### A prayerful reflection on the state of voting rights today By the Rev. Kwame Pitts

Some items of interest have happened since the June 25, 2013, decimation of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court and of the August 2013 Voting Rights Resolution that was brought to the floor of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. While there has been some progress on securing the civil rights of our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ to exercise their right to vote, there has also been much destruction of the boundaries of these rights.

In 2010 when the push for voter-rights suppression began, only two states had the issue on the ballot. After the June 25, 2013, repeal of voter rights, 22 states now have restrictions in place – 22 states whose policies are impacting many of our fellow sisters and brothers regardless of their socio-economic, cultural or ethnic background, whether they have never broken the law or whether they are an ex-offender, whether they are young or old, working, stay at home or struggling.

Florida, Iowa and South Dakota have made it significantly harder for Americans with past criminal convictions to have their voting rights restored, and this is why the issue of voter rights is tied to the ELCA's criminal justice statement. In Florida and Iowa, people with convictions are essentially permanently disenfranchised. Here are some stats: Nationally, 5.85 million Americans who have done their time have lost the right to vote; 1.5 million are in Florida. Overall, 7.7 percent of African-Americans have lost their right – compared to 1.8 percent of whites.

An 87-year-old woman who lives in Wisconsin has been registered to vote since 1947, but because of the voter -rights suppression policies, she will now need proper identification. Although the state register of deeds has a record of her birth and can produce a certified copy of her birth certificate, her last name was misspelled and, therefore, is seen as an unacceptable ID. The process to correct the birth certificate is lengthy and can cost up to \$200 or more. Just think about this happening to many of our elders that we care for in our congregations who may not have the extra money to prove that they can vote, even when they have had the right to vote for decades.

*"Whereas the United States Supreme Court has recently held Section 4b of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional ... whereas this church has recognized that many find it difficult to participate in public life because of racial or ethnic barriers." <sup>1</sup> Read Isaiah 58:6 again and then ponder the questions about the challenge that this verse provokes on how we should be living out our faith and what that means when combating the injustices regarding voting rights.*

## Questions for discussion

- > How does the Isaiah text challenge you to see injustice within your community? Who are the oppressed? What are they crying out for?
- > "[It is] resolved, that members, congregations, and synods of this church be encouraged to 'promote public life worthy of the name' by speaking out as an advocate and engaging in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens." Isaiah 58:10 clearly proclaims the good news that God stands with us as we carry out what the Creator has called us to. What ways can you serve in your communities as a reminder that God stands with the oppressed, the forgotten, the abused and the outcast?
- > How can we encourage each other to actively pursue justice?

**Other hymns to sing as community as we faithfully struggle:  
Canticle of the Turning, ELW #723; I'm So Glad, TBFF #191 ;  
Oh Freedom, TBFF #208**

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you,

the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

<sup>1</sup> [http://download.ELCA.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Voting\\_Rights\\_To\\_All\\_Citizens\\_SPR13.pdf](http://download.ELCA.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Voting_Rights_To_All_Citizens_SPR13.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+58%3A6-12&version=NRSV>