



A Study Guide for *Faith and Civic Life*

For the Well-Being of All
Session 5:

*Constructive Relationships Between Religious Organizations
and Political Authority*

Group Covenant and Guidelines

Sample covenant is based on those written by Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd and the University of Michigan Center for Research on Teaching and Learning and used with permission from Luther Seminary. From the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.

- I affirm that all have something of value to share or contribute. I also acknowledge that everyone has the chance to speak.
- I will show up as fully as possible.
- I will maintain confidentiality and expect the same in return. I will not share others' stories without their consent.
- I will encourage self-care.
- I listen to understand, not to respond.
- I assume positive intent.
- I am allowed to test issues and not necessarily own them, and I understand others may do the same. Curiosity is encouraged.
- I will both support and challenge others, will expect to be both supported and challenged by others, and will offer explanations if needed.
- I will criticize ideas, not individuals.
- I will avoid assumptions about any member of the group or generalizations about social groups.
- I will not ask individuals to speak on behalf of their social group, as I perceive that group.

Scriptural Reflection: Matthew 4:1-4, 8-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’ ”

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Setting the Table – Theological Foundations and Definitions

REMINDER: Two “Reigns” or Two “Hands”

Lutheran teaching that distinguishes between God’s activity in the world through secular means and God’s gracious activity through explicitly gracious means in the church.

The ELCA teaches that both of God’s two reigns (hands, ways, regimens) are necessary for governing creation and that they are interrelated.

From the Constitution of the ELCA

“this church will work with civil authorities
in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining
institutional separation of the church and
state in a relation of functional
interaction.”

What does this mean?

When the mutual goals of seeking the well-being for all align, church and state can and should work together.

What are the boundaries of this functional interaction?

- Government must not fund programs that discriminate between religions in providing their services and benefits.
- Government must not fund programs that require recipients to participate in religious activities as a condition of receiving a public service.
- Government must treat program service providers equally—on religious and other grounds—and selection of funded service providers must be based solely on outcomes identified in publicly available criteria.

The Johnson Amendment

“For these reasons, this church, unlike some Christian churches, teaches that it is not the church’s role to endorse candidates or parties. The ELCA also recognizes the legal soundness of the Johnson Amendment in prohibiting religious bodies or their representatives from verbally or financially supporting candidates or parties. Individual parishioners may, of course, advocate specific candidates and parties based on religious values and reasoned criteria but should not claim to do so as spokespeople for a church.” (Article 36)

What does this mean?

The church (and its rostered leaders) should not endorse particular candidates or parties AND people of faith can work for candidates or parties based on their religious values. Also, religious organizations can and should speak publicly about their values as they relate to policies and legislation – not because that legislation is “ordained by God,” but because it seems the best among the range of policy options at seeking the well-being of all.

Christian Nationalism

A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of highly selected Christian beliefs with U.S. civic life.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND WHO IS A REAL AMERICAN

Elizabeth Eaton
ELCA Presiding Bishop



Table Talk for Today

How would you describe the difference between healthy patriotism and Christian nationalism?

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