

ELCAvotes OVERVIEW

Affirming our commitment

Affirming its commitment to ensure voting rights for all U.S. citizens, the ELCA has shaped the ELCAvotes initiative with leadership of [ELCA Advocacy](#), [ELCA Racial Justice Ministries](#) and [ELCA Young Adult Ministry](#).

ELCAvotes was developed in response to “[Voting Rights to All Citizens](#),” a social policy resolution adopted by the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The resolution urges 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.”



Introduced in 2016 to help members advocate for fair elections and join local efforts to guarantee the right to vote, the ELCAvotes initiative is guided by four aims:

- expanding the role of the church in encouraging faithful and nonpartisan voter participation by providing faith-based resources around voting
- providing a framework for all Lutherans to understand and speak out about the intersection of voting and elections and racial, gender and economic justice
- amplifying the voices of young-adult leaders in the church and providing a platform for young adults to explore what it means to be a civically engaged person of faith
- engaging with and equipping ethnic communities to talk about voting rights and race and their connection with elections today

Voting as citizens and as Christians

Voting is one of the most important ways Americans can involve themselves in our representative democracy. Through the simple act of casting an informed vote, we have the opportunity and responsibility to help make decisions that will affect our lives and the lives of our families and neighbors for years to come.

Speaking out as advocates, engaging in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation that guarantees the right to vote to all citizens are activities informed in the ELCA by social teaching including the aforementioned policy resolution “Voting Rights to All Citizens” and the social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*.

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An important part of faithful civic engagement is abiding by the law. Any participation by churches in the electoral process must be strictly nonpartisan and consistent with IRS guidelines.¹

With this understood, civic engagement is an amazing opportunity to strengthen the public debate around the electoral process by allowing our faith to ground our political ideals. As long as we educate ourselves about the laws surrounding our participation in electoral affairs, there are many activities we can conduct that both demonstrate our Christian faith and provide valuable resources to our community and our nation.

Barriers to voting

Among the assurances in the ELCA social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* is that “[this] church will support legislation, ordinances, and resolutions that guarantee to all persons equally ... civil rights, including full protection of the law and redress under the law of discriminatory practices ... and to all citizens, the right to vote” (page 7).

Voter suppression is historically and currently a factor in electoral process participation. From the poll taxes and literacy tests of the Jim Crow era to restrictive voter laws today, many people of color face barriers to their right to vote.²



Election season is, unfortunately, a time when negative rhetoric is heightened, including that which belittles others and instigates fear. As Christians, we are called to foster and model civil dialogue, invite trust amid differences and lead healthy community conversations to discuss issues of the common good.

The ELCA “has already committed itself to a moral deliberation that deals openly with conflict and controversy,” reads *Freed in Christ* (page 6), which calls us to honest discussion and the growth it brings.

When we rebuild walls of hostility and live behind them—blaming others for the problem and looking to them for solutions—we ignore the role we ourselves play in the problem and also in the solution. When we confront racism and move toward fairness and justice in society, all of us benefit.”
—*Freed in Christ* (page 4)

Local ministries and advocacy groups can play a monumental role in ensuring access for all people interested in civic engagement and in guaranteeing that no voice is lost in our democratic process. Faith activists and

¹ Additional information about legal considerations can be found in the “[ELCA Civic Engagement Guide](#)” as well as “[Guidance for churches and clergy participating in the electoral process](#)” available at ELCA.org/resources/advocacy.

² More information in “[Fact & activity sheet on race and voting](#)” available from ELCA.org/resources/advocacy.

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churches engaged in the margins of society are often the best-positioned, and sometimes the only means, to expand voter outreach, for example, with people struggling with homelessness.³

Lutherans have long been involved in the fight to protect voting rights in the United States. In discussion and in actions of civic engagement, we can continue to promote policies that favor the inclusion of all.

In an election cycle and year-round

The electoral process is one way in which we live out our affirmation of baptism to “serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus” and “to strive for justice and peace in all the earth” (from the Affirmation of Baptism). Here are some ideas for ELCAvotes activity in your congregation, synod, campus ministry or other group.

1. Facilitate Bible study and discussions
 - offer regular prayer for elected leaders and good government
 - use Bible studies⁴ from ELCAvotes and other sources to explore themes
 - explore our calling as Lutherans to participate in and engage with our government
 - discuss the impact of being denied the opportunity to vote and its social, economic and political root causes

2. Participate in electoral process mobilization opportunities
 - voter registration initiatives
 - pledge-to-vote events
 - candidate forums
 - get-out-the-vote drives
 - similar ideas of your own and from the ELCA Civic Engagement Guide⁵

3. Advocate for guaranteeing the right to vote to all citizens
 - If the right to vote is hindered in your community, contact your state public policy office⁶ or the ELCA Advocacy office in Washington, D.C. A course of action can be strategized together with this leadership network.
 - Monitor the [ELCA Advocacy Action Center](#) for additional opportunities.

4. Build momentum using social media
 - Use #ELCAvotes to check out what’s happening and share your experience.
 - Tag @ELCAadvocacy, @ELCAyoungadults and @ELCA4justice as appropriate.

³ More information in “[Voter guidelines for people facing homelessness](#)” available from [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](#).

⁴ See <https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy#CivicEngagement> for Bible study options

⁵ The [ELCA Civic Engagement Guide](#) is available from [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](#)

⁶ An [ELCA Advocacy locations list and map](#) is posted to the ELCA Advocacy resource page

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Key calendar opportunities

June-August	Research early voting and absentee-voting rules for your locality. Plan & launch voter registration support.
September	Connect your efforts with National Voter Registration Day, observed on the fourth Tuesday of every September. Consider education and action on “God’s work. Our hands.” day of service.
October	Mark closing of voter registration and beginning of early voting
November	Get out the vote!

Conclusion

As U.S. citizens, we have the right, the privilege and the responsibility to be involved in the political process. As Christians, we have been freed to love our neighbor, seek peace and justice, and care for God’s creation. Our faith informs how we look at public issues and how we will participate.

By ensuring that our election systems promote dignity and respect for all, by speaking out as advocates, by engaging in local efforts to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens, and by casting our own ballots—**ELCAvotes!**

