

Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All

Preliminary One-page Summary

The 14th social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was adopted by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (this church's highest legislative body) on August 1, 2025 by a vote of 762-16. A fuller executive summary is being prepared but this preliminary version is posted as a stop-gap aid for those who wish to explore the statement text as adopted. (The text posted at this time is not yet copy-edited, formatted, or complete with embedded links. The Spanish translation process is underway but not completed.)

1. The title of the social statement captures the primary conviction of our church. God creates society with the intention that civic life seeks the well-being of all. Civic life should not favor any select group, the well-off, or the powerful.
2. *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* is a big picture document. The six sections systematically mediate between broad theological, ethical, political, and social principles and analysis to provide reasoning that responds to questions about and obstacles to the flourishing of civic life in U.S. society.
3. The statement can feel overwhelming because it does not shrink from addressing "big" issues and controversies such as religious liberty, Christian nationalism, and others. While the statement does flow as a sustained argument, it also provides Annotated Contents pages in the beginning of the document and built in links that allow readers to go directly to matters of interest. Annotated contents pages are not summaries of each article but make it easy to locate what's of interest to a particular reader. There also will be some cross references within articles to other articles. Key terms are defined in the glossary.
4. Section I assembles and explicates key Lutheran themes about civic life, stressing how God: a) works in society, and b) calls Jesus' followers to participate in that work through civic organizations and institutions.
5. Section II provides a thorough description of the nature of civic life and addresses related matters like the call to public service and the role of the congregations as sites of lively discernment. Significantly, it addresses the character of the responsible relationship between the rostered ministers' office and their public role in society.
6. Section III gives a principled assessment of the U.S. Constitution, which is a rare investigation from a principled and nuanced stance of faith. In the process the statement provides a description of power, grounded theologically. The analysis makes specific claims about how all power is grounded in God, how God intends that power to be used in society, and what criteria follow for the proper use of power in civic life. Other ELCA social statements presume concerns about the use of power and address way it may be abused, but this statement provides a sustained description.
7. Section IV delineates this church's view on the meaning of the First Amendment from the standpoint of faith. This content includes the review of several contested contemporary issues about the proper scope and limits of religious liberty. It also describes the distinction between religious liberty (a civic matter) and Christian freedom (a matter of faith).
8. Section V unpacks a constructive proposal for the critical relationship of religious organizations and political authority as framed by ELCA principles that religious organizations should "work with civil authorities" while "maintaining institutional separation in a relation of functional interaction." In this light it addresses, for instance, the meaning and use of the Johnson Amendment from both a theological and civic standpoint.
9. The final section applies the statement's general principles to selected questions not addressed, or minimally addressed, in other ELCA social teaching. Examples include discussions of "hyperpartisan polarization," the nature of constructive political discourse, American Indian tribal sovereignty, and the criteria for comprehensive civics education. There are nine such articles.
10. The ELCA develops its social teaching documents through extensive discernment procedures that encourage participation by the whole people of God and literally thousands have contributed over the five year development process. The statement also commits this church to actions as recorded in the 16 Implementing Resolutions, found at the end.