

ELCA BOYCOTT POLICY

Policies and Procedures



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Introduction

This document sets forth the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) policy and procedures for consideration, adoption, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and termination of boycotts¹. These reflect the mission of this church, expressed in the *ELCA Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions* (CBCR); they also are consistent with the ELCA's churchwide advocacy procedures.

This document begins with reference to the theological foundation of this church's commitment to justice. It addresses the nature and history of boycotts. It concludes by identifying: (1) the key issues and criteria to be addressed in assessing the merits of ELCA support for any boycott, and (2) the appropriate procedures for churchwide decisions in relation to such support.

Theological Foundation: Our Commitment to Justice

The mission of this church is grounded in the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions. We confess God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all, and Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We believe in salvation by grace alone, through faith. We respond to God's grace by practicing justice and working for peace and reconciliation in the care of all creation. Through the social policy⁽²⁾ and teaching of this church, we attempt to understand the meaning of our faith for life together in the present age. Any decision by the ELCA to participate in a boycott on any level must be consistent with this church's confession of faith and must be based upon principles articulated in its social policy.

The commitment to pursue justice and to be faithful stewards in all of life was reflected in the social statements of predecessor churches⁽³⁾. The ELCA constitution makes clear this church's commitment to work for justice and peace – committing the ELCA to participate in God's mission in the following ways:

4.02.c. Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and the powerless and committing itself to their needs.

(1) As defined later in this document, boycotts may be undertaken in response to the actions of private or public sector entities.

(2) ELCA social policy is understood as the collected policy actions by the churchwide organization, e.g., social statements, messages, Churchwide Assembly

resolutions, and Church Council resolutions.

(3) For example, in 1976, the American Lutheran Church declared, in *Manifesto for Our Nation's Third Century*, "We require that all social institutions—economic, governmental, educational, scientific, technological—be shaped to serve human needs." "And so...the...church pledges itself...to involvement in the social systems and structures, so that these become more responsive to God's will for the world." In 1980, the Lutheran Church in America adopted *Economic Justice: Stewardship In Human Community*, which stated: "It is in obedient gratitude for all gifts of God that we...commit ourselves in faithful love to struggle for economic justice as an integral part of the witness and work of God's people in the world."

4.03.g. Lift its voice in concord and work in concert with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged.

4.03.l. Study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Our Mission of Advocacy

The commitment of justice by this church is translated into action by advocacy. The CBCR assigns to the congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the churchwide organization (CSM) a lead role in this mission of advocacy:

16.12.A.10. The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit shall foster and facilitate the work of synods, congregations, and partners in making congregations vital centers for mission and in creating coalitions and networks to promote justice and peace. Its work includes..facilitating the engagement of this church in advocacy...

The ELCA employs various means in its ministry of advocacy. In the public sector, it works through its members with elected and appointed officials to influence policy and legislation in ways that are compatible with the beliefs and values articulated in its Confession of Faith and in its social statements. In the private sector, the ELCA has developed corporate social responsibility criteria to be considered for the investment of ELCA funds and as guidelines for ELCA-related and other organizations and individuals.

The ELCA also engages in dialogues with leaders of corporations to change corporate policies, files shareholder resolutions, casts proxy ballots, and takes other actions as it deems appropriate (ELCA bylaw 14.21.14). The ELCA and its members also may engage in selective purchasing and investing. A boycott would be the final step in the continuum of private sector advocacy by the ELCA, taken after other steps are exhausted and careful deliberation has been concluded.

Boycott: A Definition

In general terms, a “boycott” may be defined as follows: A collective effort to abstain from the purchase or use of products or services provided by a targeted firm, government, or other agency. The purpose of a boycott is to persuade the targeted entity to cease certain practices judged to be unjust, and/or to perform certain practices deemed to be just.

Historically, Lutherans have been involved in social movements that used boycotts as a means of witness and reform in a wide range of areas, including the consumption of liquor and tobacco, business establishments open on Sunday, objectionable entertainment, goods produced with child or slave labor, gambling, and racial discrimination.⁴ Martin Luther himself called for a boycott of the Fuggers, a merchant banking company. (5)

(4) See, e.g., Klein, Christa R. with Christian D. von Dehsen, *Politics and Policy: The Genesis and Theology of Social Statements in the Lutheran Church in America*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, ©1989, for discussion of Lutheran involvement in the temperance movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. (See the preface and Chapter 1.)

(5) Martin Luther, *On Trade and Usury*. Vol. 45: Luther’s Works.

Although predecessor bodies adopted boycott criteria and considered participation in churchwide boycotts, they did not endorse any.

Ethical, Procedural, and Pastoral Considerations: Questions To Be Addressed

In order to ensure thorough study and consideration prior to an ELCA commitment to any boycott, certain **ethical questions** must be addressed:

1. Does the boycott clearly address a significant issue of justice? That is, would the cause the boycott advances be one that promotes human dignity, protects innocent life, and preserves conditions necessary for decent human existence?
2. Is the need for redress urgent? If the practices at issue are continued, are the human costs likely to be great?
3. Have appropriate prior measures such as negotiations and shareholder resolutions been pursued and proven ineffective? Have these alternatives been given a fair chance to succeed? Is there convincing evidence that the injustices in question cannot be corrected with less disruptive measures?
4. Is failing to address the injustices of the situation likely to result in consequences more undesirable than any injustices that might result from the boycott? Can the boycott be carried out in such a way as to recognize the human dignity of those against whom it is waged?

5. Is a boycott timely? Is it likely to generate broad support in the society?
6. Who organizes the boycott and who do they represent? Do they have a legitimate right to represent the people they claim to help? Is there assurance that the boycott will be carried on with integrity?

A **second set of questions** is more procedural and institutional in its orientation:

1. Does this church have a clear position in its social policy on the issue to be addressed by the boycott?
2. Is there a significant chance of success if an adequate strategy and implementation plan are employed?
3. Have local and regional church leaders in the area that will be most affected by the boycott been consulted?
4. Within this church, is there a willingness and capability to undertake the educational, interpretive, and organizational efforts required to acquaint ELCA members with the issues and rationale and to organize effective participation?
5. Has a work plan been prepared to show how the boycott will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated?
6. How will the boycott be conducted as part of the strategy for continuing negotiation with the corporation? How does the boycott issue relate to an overall assessment of the corporation?
7. Have measurable goals been articulated so that the ELCA will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of its boycott strategy and to know when the boycott has succeeded or failed? Have the conditions under which the boycott will be suspended or terminated been clearly stated?

Finally, important **pastoral questions** must be addressed:

1. Can the boycott be carried out in such a way as to reduce as much as possible the suffering of innocent third parties? Has adequate consideration been given to how such people can be (4) supported pastorally and economically and to the manner in which this church's support of the boycott can be interpreted to them?
2. How will the boycott contribute to the prophetic mission of this church and how is it compatible with its advocacy ministry? Are there approaches that represent a more effective use of the resources available? Will the boycott unduly risk the closing of other appropriate avenues for addressing the issue? Will it distract attention from other more important issues? Will it be conducive to right relationships within and beyond this church?
3. Can and will the boycott be carried out in such a way that there are possibilities for reconciliation once the boycott is terminated?

The purpose of posing and addressing these questions in an open fashion, rather than

stating unequivocal requirements, which must all be met, is to assure that the difficult issues inherent in a boycott will be confronted, without imposing an unduly rigid requirement. The hope is that, under the particular circumstances, ELCA consideration of any boycott will integrate prophetic and symbolic roles with concerns for instrumental effectiveness and church credibility. There may be circumstances that would lead the church in its prophetic ministry to endorse a boycott even when some of these questions have ambiguous answers.

Procedures for Consideration and Decision

The executive director of the CSM unit, the Conference of Bishops, or the Administrative Team may raise the question of ELCA support for a given boycott. The ELCA Church Council or its Executive Committee may also refer synod resolutions proposing boycotts to the director for advocacy for consideration. In either case, the director for advocacy then will convene an inter-unit review group to consider the advantages and disadvantages, including consideration of each of the questions set forth above. The consultant for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will be responsible for conducting or coordinating the necessary research, providing an inter-unit review group with the information required to consider the above questions, and for advising the group regarding implementation.

If the inter-unit review group is convinced that the answers to the above questions merit ELCA endorsement of a boycott, it may recommend such support to the executive director of CSM unit. The executive director will consult the ELCA Administrative Team or the Conference of Bishops for preparation of recommendations to the ELCA Church Council. Endorsement of any boycott requires ELCA Church Council approval.

In the absence of any ELCA position on a specific boycott, designated ELCA representatives to national ecumenical organizations may vote at their individual discretion on the boycott positions of those organizations, without their individual actions implying any corporate position of the ELCA.

Boycott Information

The advocacy team in the CSM unit is responsible for maintaining and providing information regarding boycotts to units and expressions of this church, to members of the ELCA, to ELCA-related organizations, and others. Such information could include the social policy of the church on the issue and plans for the conduct of the boycott.

Annually, the director for advocacy will review boycotts across the nation and the world and will convene, as needed, an inter-unit review group. If a meeting of the group has been convened, a report will be submitted to the ELCA Church Council.(5)

What Does ELCA Boycott Participation Mean?

ELCA endorsement of a boycott may involve a range of possible activities, which could be incorporated in a boycott implementation plan. This plan would address:

- The extent and nature of involvement sought by churchwide offices, synods, congregations, families, and individuals;
- The nature of participation in broader coalition efforts;
- Development and dissemination of educational materials;
- The effect on purchasing practices;
- Plans for approaching institutional purchasers outside this church; and
- Appropriate communications by organizations and members of this church to the corporation in question.

ELCA endorsement of a boycott commits the churchwide organization to participate in the boycott. It also constitutes a recommendation to synods, congregations, members, as well as ELCA-related and other organizations to participate in the boycott.

Whenever the ELCA supports a boycott, it is essential that appropriate measures be taken to ensure that the conduct of the boycott will be sufficiently accountable to the ELCA and to provide for withdrawal of the endorsement when it becomes advisable. If a coalition board is managing the boycott, accountability might be arranged by designating an official representative of the ELCA to serve on that board and report to the director for advocacy, who will report to the Church Council.

- *Church Council adopted an ELCA Boycott Policy and Procedures, November 1989 (CC89.11.183)*
- *Revision Recommended by Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, January 14, 2005*
- *Revision Approved by Executive Committee, March 9, 2005 (EC05.03.09)*
- *Revision Recommended by Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, January 11, 2008*
- *Revision Approved by Church Council, April 2008 (CC08.04.XXb)*
- *Revision Approved by Church Council, April 2012 (CC12.04.09)*