

CIVIL MATTERS

Social Policy Resolution

CA87.30.14



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

WHEREAS, the Commission for a New Lutheran Church has studied and debated the legal rights of congregations and church members with a view to formulating policies for the church to be presented at its Constituting Convention; and

WHEREAS, the Commission for a New Lutheran Church has developed and approved recommendations with respect to privileged communication with clergypersons, chaplaincies supported by government, civil disobedience, and the bearing of arms; now, therefore, it is hereby

RESOLVED, that the statements of policy set forth below are hereby approved, and the delegates to the Constituting Convention are directed to approve such statements as the policies of the Church:

a. Privileged Communication with Clergypersons

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that its pastors are obligated not to divulge any confidential disclosure made to them in the course of their pastoral ministry, nor to testify concerning conduct observed by them while working in a pastoral capacity, except with the express permission of the person who has confided in them or was observed, or if the person intends great harm to self or others.

b. Chaplaincies Supported by Government

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that chaplaincies supported by the government must be granted the right to provide ministry according to the faith and practice of the ecclesiastical traditions from which the chaplains come.

c. Civil Disobedience

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asserts its commitment to the rule of law as an expression of the will of God for human societies. Nevertheless, it is recognized that laws may be enacted, or social customs may exist, which are believed to be in basic conflict with the moral law of God or the constitutional law of the land. When the means of legal recourse have not brought relief, Christians may then choose to serve the cause of justice by disobeying a law that clearly involves the violation of their obligations as believers, so long as the disobedience is done (1) only as a last resort; (2) only by nonviolent means after earnestly seeking the counsel of other Christians and the will of God in prayer; (3) always for the sake of the larger community; (4) always with respect for the consciences of those who disagree; (5) always with willingness to accept the legal penalty for their action. The ELCA affirms as normative the teaching of the church in Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession: "Christians are obliged to be subject to civil authority and obey its commands and law in all that can be done without sin, we must obey God rather than [human authority] (Acts 5:29)."

d. The Bearing of Arms

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America supports those of its members who conscientiously object to bearing arms in military service at any time, those who in conscience object to participation in a particular war or military activity (such as the refusal

to use weapons of mass destruction in combat), and those who in conscience choose to participate in armed service.

Adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1987