



# A STUDY CURRICULUM ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH

LEADER GUIDE - SESSION 2



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



## SESSION 2: HOW DO CHRISTIANS ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL CIVIC ISSUES?

*Discerning what we believe individually and as a Church.*

### SUPPLIES

- Participant Guide (one per person)
- Covenant Handout (one per person)
- Pens
- Electronic device with video cued up: <https://vimeo.com/788800552>
- Participant Response Form (link provided for online response; print copies for participants who prefer paper)
- Hymnals (optional)
- Piano or other accompaniment (optional)
- Video transcript (optional, for the hearing-impaired)
- Consider sharing with group or discussing one of the On-the-Ground case studies.

### OPEN (5-10 minutes)

#### WELCOME

**Welcome participants to the second session of the study. Introduce yourself to new attendees. Then read together the welcome paragraphs in the Participant Guide:**

**PG** Dealing with controversial issues is a significant challenge for all of us. Whether on social media or in face-to-face conversations, rhetoric can grow heated, straining friendships and family ties. Even when we would rather avoid controversy and stay at peace, we know the stakes of some issues are too high to ignore.

In this session, we will explore elements for constructive engagement when addressing controversial issues as a **community of moral discernment**. Looking at the history of the church and examining contemporary examples, we can learn from the successes and mistakes of the church's more-than-2,000-year history of engagement with critical issues. From that history, six elements emerge as particularly helpful: (1) understanding the issue as objectively and unbiasedly as possible, (2) listening to different voices close to the issue, (3) praying for clarity of mind

to discern the Spirit's wisdom, (4) discerning together how the Holy Scriptures illuminate the issue, (5) acting with the boldness of love and the humility of faith, and (6) confessing how even our best efforts fall short as we acknowledge that everything ultimately depends on God's grace.

#### CONSENSUS ON MODELING HOLY CONVERSATIONS

**Read the following:**

**Those six elements of constructive engagement can empower Christians like us to see controversy as an opportunity to practice our faith principles. It is an opportunity to bracket our biases, hear each other, and discern together. Let's take a moment to review the group covenant together. The point of these study groups is not to make members of one opinion but to model respect and Christian love, as we are one in Christ, with many voices and views. How do you think we as a [congregation/ministry group] can facilitate engagement with critical issues in ways that avoid the toxicity and divisiveness that permeates so much of our world?**

**Review the covenant. Check in about how well the covenant was kept in the first session and anything that needs to be reinforced.**

**Invite participant volunteers to read the opening prayer and Scripture. Lead the opening litany, then sing all or part of a hymn if appropriate for your gathering space.**

## OPENING PRAYER

**PG** A prayer from Martin Luther:  
Dear heavenly Father, say something. I will gladly remain silent and be a child and student. If I ruled my life with my own knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, I would have been sunk long ago. Therefore, dear God, you guide and direct it. I will gladly forsake my point of view and understanding and let you rule alone through your Word. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## SCRIPTURE

**PG** <sup>1</sup>Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, <sup>3</sup>saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” <sup>4</sup>Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, <sup>5</sup>“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. <sup>6</sup>As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup>I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup>But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup>But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ <sup>10</sup>This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. <sup>11</sup>At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen

the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup>he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:1-18).

## LITANY (Adapted from *This Far by Faith*)

**PG** Leader: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your loving kindness. In your great mercy, wash away our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin.

**All: Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Leader: Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life.

**All: Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and sustain us with your Spirit. Amen.**

## HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- “O God of Light” (ELW 507)
- “Ubi caritas et amor/Where True Charity and Love Abide” (ELW 642, WOV 665)
- “Bind Us Together” (TFF 217, WOV 748)
- “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (ELW 656, WOV 370)
- “God Is Love” (ACS 1041)

<sup>1</sup> Thomas McPherson, *Prayers of the Reformers* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2017), 51.

## HEARING EACH OTHER (5-10 minutes)

### PARTICIPANT PAIRINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/STORY PROMPTS

**Invite participants to pair up with someone they don't know well or know to be often of differing opinions regarding current events. Invite one to speak while the other listens, taking turns back and forth.**

- PG • Recall, as you are willing, how disagreements and differing beliefs were dealt with when you were young:
  - (1) Among the adults in the household where you were raised.
  - (2) By your childhood friends, neighbor kids, and classmates.
  - (3) Among your extended relatives.
  - (4) In your faith community, if applicable.
- How do you think these early experiences shaped you and your ways of addressing conflict and differences as an adult?

### PREVIOUS SESSION REVIEW

**Ask participants to share observations from the time between group sessions.**

## STUDY (30-35 minutes)

**Refer participants to the Scripture printed in the opening devotion. Offer a moment for everyone to review it silently. Then read and discuss the following:**

- PG • Consider what happened to Peter according to Acts 11. The animals that Peter was told to “kill and eat” were forbidden foods. That prohibition was not a human invention; according to Leviticus 11, those dietary restrictions had been given by God through Moses. Likewise, the rite of circumcision had been mandated directly by God to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17. In fact, God had decreed that “any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of

his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:14).

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Therefore, what Peter was asked to do in this vision was very significant: to eat what God had said was unclean to eat and to “make no distinction between them [the uncircumcised] and us [the circumcised]” (Acts 11:12). This was extremely controversial! Yet it was clear to Peter that this change was from God. Therefore, he convinced other leaders of the early church to embrace that change, namely that “what God has made clean, you must not call profane” (11:9) and that “God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life” (11:18).

- Peter and the other leaders of the early church had to discern whether this vision and its instructions were truly from God. What criteria can we use to determine whether new insights and interpretations accord with God's will?
- Peter asked, “Who was I that I could hinder God?” How might our current level of polarization and vitriol hinder God's mission in the world?
- What rules seem unchangeable in your church, community, profession, country, and so on? What purpose do they serve?
- Are there any sacred rules or interpretations that God might be calling us to rethink or even change?
- Do you think God's mind can be changed? Can the meaning of sacred texts change over time?
- God's instructions to Peter changed Christianity forever. How do we balance faithfulness to tradition with openness to new possibilities inspired by the Holy Spirit?

**PLAY VIDEO** (19 minutes long)  
<https://vimeo.com/788800552>

**Make sure all can see and hear the video. Provide a transcript for participants who are hearing-impaired.**

## POST-VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*After watching the video, discuss the following in small groups.*

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1. Remember a time when a group you were part of had to engage in a controversial issue. What did you learn from the process? What was helpful and what wasn't? Did you use any of the elements listed in the video? How did you use them?
2. Reflect on an experience when you saw the church engage in a controversial issue in a way that you thought was helpful. What was the issue? How did the church address it? What was helpful about the approach?
3. Consider how you think the Holy Scriptures can shed light on controversial issues. What teachings or passages from Scripture have you found to be particularly helpful when dealing with controversial issues?
4. What resources do you rely upon for expert analysis and unbiased understanding of controversial issues?
5. What are ways to listen to the different voices that are close to an issue? How can we hear and seek to understand perspectives that are radically different from our own?
6. How do people of faith address opinions that encourage hatred, violence, or prejudice?

**SEND (5-10 minutes)**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Invite original participant pairings to group together again. Discuss the following:*

1. Reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, and gifts of your specific church community. Are there any current civic issues that your community of faith is particularly well-placed to engage in a helpful way? Which ones? How can you begin to address them?

## GROUP SHARING OF REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS

*As time allows, invite participants to share what new insights they have gained from today's session about practicing faith in the world.*

## FACILITATOR SUMMARY

*Read the following summary:*

Engaging civically and addressing controversial political issues is difficult, but it is an expression of our Christian love in the public sphere. As fallible, finite, and sinful creatures, we know that we will never arrive at a place where we hold all truths. Controversial issues will not be solved because we have convinced everyone else to do what we think is right. Only God knows what is right. Nonetheless, we trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we give our due diligence to understand, listen, pray, discern, act, and confess, even as we understand we are not saved by our works but by the grace of God, in whom our faith rests. Our discipleship asks us to join others with different views, creeds, and backgrounds in heeding the call of the Spirit to testify humbly and boldly to what we have found in our careful process of discernment.

## PARTICIPANT RESPONSE FORM

*Pass out copies of the Participant Response Form and point out the link for online response in the Participant Guide.*

In this second session, you again have a chance to share your thoughts with the task force as part of the social statement development process. Please complete either a paper or online version of the Participant Response Form, knowing that your responses will be read by members of the task force.

Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/95S8LQK> or on paper. Scan and email your paper form to [civicsandfaith@elca.org](mailto:civicsandfaith@elca.org) or send it by U.S. mail to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Attn: Civics and Faith, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Your feedback will be read by the task force as part of the social statement development process.

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## CLOSING PRAYER

*Close in prayer, using your own words or the following:*

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ("Evening Prayer," *ELW*, p. 317)

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

### PROMPTS FOR ACTION OUTSIDE THE STUDY GROUP

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- As a group, compile and curate a list of news outlets that you find particularly trustworthy. Make sure you include sources from different ideological viewpoints (e.g., conservative, liberal, libertarian, progressive, etc.). Divide them into two categories: those that are good about describing the facts without bias and those that offer reasonable analysis from an ideological standpoint.
- Organize events where you invite experts on controversial issues important to your community to participate in dialogue panels. Plan them as an opportunity to model respectful listening as you hear directly from people on different sides of an issue, and set them up not as a debate or with goals to convince others but to help people understand different perspectives.
- Establish a regular prayer group where people from different ideological camps come together to pray for the well-being of the community without directly engaging in debates on issues.

## WEBSITES

Book of Faith Initiative 4-Fold Method of Reading Scripture: <https://tinyurl.com/24czs7wh>

The Kettering Foundation: Dedicated to identifying and practicing what it takes to make democracy work as it should through responsible citizenship, robust democratic practices, and working together to address common problems. [www.kettering.org/](http://www.kettering.org/)

Braver Angels: A national movement to bridge the partisan divide, bringing conservatives and progressives together on equal terms to understand their differences, find common ground where it exists, and help the country we all love find a better way. [braverangels.org/](http://braverangels.org/)

Baylor Public Deliberation Initiative: A set of helpful guiding principles for public deliberation on difficult issues, offered by Baylor University. [www.baylor.edu/pdi/index.php?id=966174](http://www.baylor.edu/pdi/index.php?id=966174)

## BOOKS

Birch, Bruce C. and others, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life: A New Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

Schade, Leah D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

## GLOSSARY (Note: Some words are used only in the video.)

**Civic engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public/civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for government leaders.

**Community of Moral Deliberation/Discernment:** A concept established in the first ELCA social statement, *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* and considered an element of the ELCA's identity into which our church must grow. The concept envisions the whole Christian community praying for each other, studying Scripture, and wrestling together toward moral understanding and action. This approach to doing ethics is ground-up, rather than top-down. Its roots are found in Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles of the Book of Concord that spell out the marks of the church, one of which is "the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters."

**Politics:** From the Greek term "polis" for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good.

## SESSION 2 VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Greeting in Christ. My name is Carmelo Santos. I serve in the Office of the Presiding Bishop as director for Theological Diversity and Engagement and am the associate director for the Civic Life and Faith Task Force. The focus of this second study session asks how Christians in the Lutheran tradition address controversial issues in healthy and constructive ways.

Before getting into the how, let's remind ourselves of the why. That is, why should Christians and churches give attention to civics or politics? After all, for many, church is meant to be a place of peace, a refuge where people can take a break from the bickering and toxicity that permeates so much of society, focusing instead on God and spiritual matters. There is also the idea that religion and political matters should never be related to one another, because any connection is a violation of the principle of the separation of church and state.

We must be careful about how we relate religion and political questions, but as we discussed in the first session of this study, there are good reasons for the church to thoughtfully address public issues. In the last session, Pastor Willer explained that politics is a basic fact of human life, "the ordering, the governing of life in community." In the Bible, the word of God addresses the political when it calls upon the community of faith to seek justice and to look after the well-being of the most vulnerable members of society—the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners, and outcasts. Politics is simply the means by which society addresses those issues collectively.

In worship we are gathered as a church, forgiven, fed, and sent into the world to do God's work, including the work of civic engagement and politics. It is "God's work, our hands."

Of course, we do God's work in our individual vocations as farmers, ranchers, scientists, teachers, students, janitors, lawyers, day laborers, politicians, as parents, caregivers, as neighbors and friends, etc. But we also engage in God's work when we take the time to study important issues that affect our communities, our nation, and our planet. Lutherans teach that government is a gift from God, but it is our shared responsibility as citizens to demand that this gift is used for its intended purpose, namely for the common good. Christ's command to love our neighbors is often fulfilled through politics and citizenship, especially in a democracy.

So, how then should we as Lutheran Christians engage controversial issues in civics and politics? There are two things to keep in mind.

First, consider that if issues are controversial, it is because they are important; otherwise people would say, "Who cares?" Faithful practices, when used properly, can provide helpful insights about how to navigate these difficult situations. After all, faith is not just about what we do in church but about the totality of life as illuminated by the living word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, if issues are controversial, it is because they are not easy to figure out. That is hard to remember when we have strong convictions and feelings in favor (or against) one side of an issue. If both sides are passionate about an issue, then it is worth asking ourselves why. The answer cannot be simply because the other side is stupid or evil. That simplification can be hard to avoid in practice, but when we do, the results are powerful—as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. showed when he sought to love one's enemies in the context of the civil rights movement in the U.S.

With that in mind, let us explore practices that help people engage constructively when addressing controversial issues. The practices can be summarized by the words understand, listen, pray, discern, act, and confess. These are not sequential steps but elements in the church's process of spirit-led and Scripture-rooted communal moral deliberation.

First, we must try to understand the issue. Let's face it, sometimes we think we understand the problem when we only have an opinion about it without knowing the facts. Here are some helpful questions:

- What are the basic facts and circumstances? (At this point, avoid delving into motivations or intent; just describe actions, behaviors, and consequences.)
- How did we get here? (What is the history of the issue?)
- Who are the experts on this issue? What are they saying? On what basis?
- What do we know about the quality of our sources? What are other sources saying?
- What are different possible interpretations of the facts?

Research in the neuroscience of emotions highlights the important roles that emotions play in guiding our reasoning and even in the way we perceive things. Emotions are important for wise decision making, but we should be mindful of the ways our perceptions are shaped by how we feel about our past experiences and expectations about the future. It's useful to postpone our initial judgment in a spirit of curiosity.

Second, we must listen carefully to the voices of those closest to the issue and of those most directly affected by it. This easily can be overlooked. Here are some questions to ask:

- Who are those with firsthand experiences or most affected?
- Who are the acknowledged experts? (Who are the specialists who have done the careful, painstaking work of investigating the issue and analyzing it as objectively as possible without the noise of partisan politics or the media's penchant for sensationalist frenzy?)
- Who are the voices being ignored, excluded, or ridiculed? What do they say?
- How are you and your community directly affected by the issue? How might that be the lens through which you view the issue and how you and your community listen to the differing voices?

In prayer, we lift up to God our troubling questions, concerns, joys, sorrows and perplexity. In turn, God speaks wisdom and provides us with new insights, vistas, perspectives, and possibilities. Prayer is saying, as Jesus taught us, "thy will be done." The point of prayer is not to bring God to our side of a controversy but to humbly invite God's wisdom to guide us. It opens a space where our spirit can listen to God's Spirit. Prayer is individual and communal.

The next element for communal moral deliberation is discernment through the study of the Holy Scriptures. God's voice, the living voice of the gospel, addresses us when we prayerfully approach the difficult task of studying the scriptures in their context while asking how they might be relevant to ours. As Psalm 119 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (105) The light doesn't dictate where exactly to go; the light allows us to see the terrain in front of us more clearly so that we can make a responsible decision on how to proceed.

Like prayer, interpreting the Scriptures involves the community. It benefits from the accumulated wisdom of the church, including things like social statements and contributions from the global church. It is not uncommon for people who are equally faithful and sincere to arrive at different conclusions from their scriptural discernment. Rather than suppressing such differences, we can learn from each other. For example, there are four Gospels in the New Testament rather than just one; they don't agree in every detail even while all four point to Christ.

The church is called to action, to be a transforming yeast. We must realize that sometimes members of the same congregation will come to different conclusions about how they are called to act. And this is okay; we must respect each other's sincere processes.

This is especially important for clergy to observe. Preachers, in particular, have a captive audience from the pulpit. What they say often carries a lot of weight for many people. Therefore, care must be taken to not use the sermon as a “bully pulpit” to push for a particular side of an issue. That does not mean that preachers should say nothing; in some instances, to remain silent is to encourage evil and betray the concrete demands of love-of-neighbor. It simply means to stay close to the Word and use the sermon as intended: to proclaim good news and shed light on issues facing the community and the world. There are other forums where pastors and other church leaders can share how they see an issue and where their own discernment has led them. In those contexts, people can push back, ask questions, and share their own responses. Church leaders bear responsibility for guiding the church in its discernment and moral deliberation processes thoughtfully.

Nothing that we do is free from the corrupting power of sin. Even the greatest acts of sacrificial love and kindness carry with them the marks of sin’s subtle influence. We confess that we are sinners and saints at the same time, all the time! If there is anything holy in us, it is from Christ, that we claim only by faith. We must be alert to the unintended consequences of our acts and to the ways we contribute to oppression and error. This is true of all people, even if we ourselves belong to an oppressed group or, especially, when we think we are fighting evil. All action must begin and end with confession because of the germ of sin in all of us.

In summary, we seek understanding, we pray, we discern, and we act boldly with faith, love, and hope. We confess and ask God’s forgiveness for the ways in which we inadvertently participate in the same injustices we are trying to remedy. Everything depends on grace. Thanks be to God.

Remembering these means, we can now be aided by examples of how the church has engaged controversial issues throughout history.

The church has been dealing with controversial civic and political issues from its origins. As one example, the Reformation movement from which the Lutheran branch of Christianity emerged was intimately involved in the political issues of 16th-century Europe.

The reformers pushed for schools to be open for boys *and girls* regardless of their social status or economic means. They crafted legislation to develop community chests to tend to the needs of the poor, they lobbied the nobility for reforms on behalf of the peasants (even when it didn’t end well), They fought for religious freedom and greater political autonomy across Europe. There was both progress and failure in these efforts. Often the reformers allowed their great passion for defending the truth to outweigh their duty to do so with love of enemies. We must learn from their mistakes as well as from their successes.

The Lutheran reformation is not just a European affair; it is a global movement. There are many inspiring examples from around the global Lutheran church modeling how controversial issues in civics and politics are being addressed effectively from the perspective of faith and love-of-neighbor. There is much that we can learn from each other.

For example, Lutheran Nobel Peace Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee, during her country’s civil war, “organized the grassroots movement *Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace*, which held meetings at which Christian and Muslim women jointly presented a non-violent message of peace.”<sup>2</sup> They called out the men who were driving the violence and notified them that they were going to be fasting for peace; their fast included abstaining from sexual intimacy. Soon there was peace!

On the other side of the Atlantic and south of the U.S. border during the terrible civil wars and dictatorships in Central and South America, Bishop Medardo Gomes of the Lutheran Church in El Salvador famously coined a “Theology of Life” to counter the “Squadrons of Death” and the culture of violence that were wreaking havoc on the people. Once, a group of soldiers went to the Lutheran cathedral in El Salvador to arrest the bishop for

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<sup>2</sup> Leymah Gbowee: Facts,” Nobel Prize, [www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2011/gbowee/facts/](http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2011/gbowee/facts/).

his denunciations against the violence of the state. Since he was not there, they took with them a cross from the sanctuary and put it in prison. Ever since then, that cross is known as “la cruz subversiva”—the subversive cross.

From within the ELCA we can also gather many inspiring examples of how Lutherans are not afraid to engage in controversial issues in civics and politics as a way of practicing faith active in love. There is, for example, the fierce work by Native American Lutheran leaders, such as the late Rev. Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo, to repudiate the doctrine of discovery, the legal basis used to expropriate lands from Native Americans.

There are those working for the humane treatment of migrants and refugees, through agencies like Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the ELCA’s *AMMPARO* (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) as well as the network of Lutheran Social Service agencies. Others advocate for the rights of farmers and for solutions for ranchers affected by severe drought. Others, like Lutherans Restoring Creation, find creative ways to address the consequences and causes of climate change. There are so many more examples, often being done by anonymous, everyday heroes like you and your congregation, that embody the healing love of Christ in the world in small but powerful ways.

We don’t all agree on the issues and we don’t all agree on the best ways to address them; that’s why they are controversial. But we agree that we are called to love our neighbors as testimony of that love with which we ourselves have been loved and transformed. We commit to discerning together as a community of moral deliberation, seeking to understand what it means for each one of us in our particular settings to heed Jesus’ call to love our neighbor, including in the public sphere.

## **CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH STUDY GROUP COVENANT**

Our commitment is to lift up the body of Christ through words and actions that:

- **Follow the Golden Rule: do unto others as I expect them to do unto me.**
- **Model respectful and careful listening, without interrupting.**
- **Strive to understand each other's insights and experiences.**
- **Speak honestly, as an individual rather than for a group.**
- **Do not presume that others speak on behalf of a group.**
- **Utilize any technology constructively and not as a distraction.**
- **Step up to share thoughts, then step back to allow others to share theirs.**
- **Be mindful of viewpoints not represented.**
- **Fervently seek the Holy Spirit's presence and blessing in the group and our civic life.**