



# A STUDY CURRICULUM ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH

LEADER GUIDE - SESSION 3



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



## SESSION 3: WHAT ARE LUTHERAN VIEWS ON CIVIC LIFE?

*Discerning common Lutheran theological themes regarding civic life.*

### SUPPLIES

- Participant Guide (one per person)
- Covenant Handout (one per person)
- Pens
- Electronic device with video cued up: <https://vimeo.com/788802177>
- 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 third session of the study. If there are any new attendees, introduce yourself. Then read together the welcome paragraphs in the Participant Guide:**

**PG** From our church's beginnings in 16<sup>th</sup> century German lands, the reformers who inspired and shaped Lutheranism sought to be both active followers of Christ and engaged members of social and political communities. Some consider our spiritual and worldly lives to be radical opposites. Others imagine a rigid hierarchy where religious concerns are more important than worldly needs. The Lutheran tradition has resisted these extremes, offering a vision that God works through human hands and commits to the flourishing of our shared lives.

The Lutheran reformers arrived at this vision by spending time with the stories of God and God's people in the Bible. We see in Scripture a God who wants to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

While sharing much in common with the larger Christian tradition, the reformers also crafted unique theological vocabulary to describe and understand God's work in and through the world. In the household and the sanctuary, the family room and the courtroom, Lutherans believe that God is living and moving. As Luther modeled in the catechism, we continually ask, "What does this mean?"

#### CONSENSUS ON MODELING HOLY CONVERSATIONS

**Read the following:**

**As emphasized in Session 1 and Session 2, it is especially important that Christians model civil discourse and engagement in the political sphere today. Our civility is a witness to God's love and grace amid the differences, division, and disagreements of a complicated world. Remembering this, let's review the group covenant together.**

**Review covenant. Check in about how it has gone in the two previous sessions. If there have been challenges, share observations about recommitting to the conversation covenant. Then read the following:**

**We are one in Christ but with many voices and views. When confronting issues from the public sphere, let us agree that we don't have to agree. The covenant is about how we talk and listen together in a holy way that respects how others come to a different point of view. Here, we give space for disagreement, wonder, and new understandings. The point of this study is not for members of ELCA faith communities to agree on every issue, but to engage in civil discourse on faith matters related to our civic engagement.**

**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** Gracious God, through your prophets you awaken us to your desire for justice and the common good. May justice roll like a river, and righteousness and integrity like an ever-flowing stream. Drive us out into costly service for the sake of others. Give us strong hearts and voices to satisfy your desire for justice for the most vulnerable and oppressed. Inspire us to engage in the good trouble of the gospel, following the example of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## SCRIPTURE

**PG** "Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:23-24).

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

Leader: God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,

**All: You have brought us this far along the way.**

Leader: In times of bitterness, you did not abandon us,

**All: But guided us into the path of love and light.**

Leader: In every age you sent prophets

**All: To make known your loving will for all humanity.**

Leader: The cry of the poor has become your own cry;

**All: Our hunger and thirst for justice is your own desire.** (From *This Far by Faith*)

## HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- "Let Justice Flow Like Streams" (ELW 717, TFF 48, WOV 763)
- "Let Streams of Living Justice" (ELW 710)
- "God of Grace and God of Glory" (ELW 705, LBW 415)
- "Caninemos con Jesús" (ACS 1061)

## 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 someone who often holds different opinions on current events. Invite participants to recall examples of positive and negative conversations around the intersection of faith and politics by reading the following:**

On your Participant Guide, you'll find a two-sided box labeled "Positive Experience" and "Negative Experience." In each one, jot down a few notes that only you will see, recalling face-to-face or digital conversations in which political issues were discussed. If possible, recall a positive example of people airing different opinions, in which no one made assumptions about others' beliefs, people were given time to reflect, and genuine concerns were shared and heard. Then, recall a less

congenial discussion in which people felt dismissed or lectured, the conversation turned aggressive, or difference of opinion divided people.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCE
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

**Give participants a silent minute to recall these two experiences and note them in the boxes on their Participant Guide. Then, invite the pairs to talk with one another, taking turns answering the questions in their handout:**

**PG** With your discussion partner, reflect upon the similarities and differences in your experiences.

- How did it feel to emerge from a healthy conversational experience? How did it feel to emerge from an unhealthy conversational experience? What sticks with you from each experience even after some time has passed? How did the conversation change the relationships between people involved in it?
- Many people have felt heightened anxiety after negative experiences discussing polarizing issues. How does it feel remembering the negative incident now?
- How do you view this experience through the lens of your faith? What responsibility do you feel to have conversations with people with whom you disagree? How does your faith shape how you respond and react to people with differing opinions? What dangers, if any, do you see in avoiding difficult discussions with those with whom you disagree?

- How do you think your experiences have shaped your outlook on civic matters and what can, or cannot, be discussed in the church or among people of faith?

**PG**

## PREVIOUS SESSION REVIEW

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

## STUDY (30-35 minutes)

### Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20:

<sup>18</sup>“You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people.

<sup>19</sup>You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. <sup>20</sup>Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

### Discuss the following questions in the Participant Guide:

- In Deuteronomy, Moses spoke to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. His instructions spelled out boundaries within which the people were to live to remain faithful to God. Why does or doesn't it surprise you that the passage includes directions for local government?
- Imagine that the prophets could communicate God's will to us in our current time and place. What might they tell us about how our discipleship should look in life and in politics?

**PG**

**PLAY VIDEO** (15 minutes long)  
<https://vimeo.com/788802177>

**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. Shuffle groups if size allows.*

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1. Lutherans understand sin as both individual and societal, and understand themselves as simultaneously sinful and righteous. If there are no “good people” or “bad people,” and if our sins are woven into societal systems, how then should we respond to injustice in societal systems?
2. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, talk of “kingdoms” was common, but this is no longer the case. How would you update the word “kingdom” to match our modern experience in a democratic society?
3. Lutheran tradition frequently emphasizes God’s working through the coercive power of laws (God’s “left hand”). This suggests that everyone in society, including even the most faithful Christians, need the law for correction and guidance. What does this teach about human beings and our sin? How might recognizing the power of sin in ourselves help our mutual dialogue in a polarized time?
4. At one extreme we fear overzealous and misguided movements, just as the reformers worried about violent rebellions and war. At the other extreme we worry about passivity and excessive deference to those in authority, the kind of complacency that lets injustice and oppression run rampant. Which threat—passivity or misguided activity—worries you more, and why?
5. Before the Reformation, religious callings were celebrated careers whereas household work, average jobs, and public service were regarded as inferior. Lutheran thinking in the Reformation radically reshaped how we value work and service in the world. Today, public service (especially elected office) is perhaps again considered far from holy. How might this contribute to a disconnect between faith in God, discipleship, public service, and even voting?

6. Conversations about **politics**, government, and civic life can be contentious and make us uncomfortable. Would you prefer your church community to be a place that risks tough conversations and discernment, or a place that avoids political and social conversations that might highlight difference? What are the perils of each option?

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## SEND (5-10 minutes)

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Invite the original participant pairings to reunite.*

1. What ideas do you have for connecting our reforming Lutheran theological and historical inheritance with the challenges we face today?
2. What opportunities do you find invigorating and exciting as you understand your calling in our shared civic life?

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### 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:*

**As Lutherans, we bring specific ideas to people’s understanding of government and civic life, ideas that are both gifts and challenges to live out. The world is full of sin, but it remains God’s world; God is present and active in its every corner. God’s right hand transforms hearts toward faith while God’s left hand pushes and cajoles us through laws and boundaries. Both hands seek the same outcome—a fulfilling life for all. Government or the political estate is affirmed as God’s gift, but its purpose is to provide safety and to order life. When it does not, it should be challenged. Our Lutheran heritage has too often valued comfortable patience when uncomfortable action was required.**

## POST-SESSION RESOURCES

As simultaneous saints and sinners, we are called by God to discern the truth together and join in civic work that lifts up the good of all.

### PARTICIPANT RESPONSE FORM

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

In this third session, you again have a chance to share your thoughts with the task force as part of the social statement development process. Please complete one version, knowing that your responses will be read by members of the task force.

PG Complete the response form either online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XZYYN8R> 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.

### CLOSING PRAYER

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

Gracious God, in Christ you tear down the barriers that keep us from knowing your love. Today we give thanks for the insights and inspiration our Lutheran heritage brings to our civic lives. Forgive us for the times when we have valued comfortable patience over the uncomfortable action required. Help us to claim our vocation of citizenship and to make the gift of government serve the safety and flourishing of human life, as you intend. This we ask you, the governor of all creation. Amen.

### WEBSITES

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social message, "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy": [ELCA.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/government](https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/government) PG

### ARTICLES

"Between Faith and Fake News," Lutheran World Federation, Oct. 29, 2020, [www.lutheranworld.org/news/between-faith-and-fake-news](http://www.lutheranworld.org/news/between-faith-and-fake-news) PG

Deifelt, Wanda, "Advocacy, Political Participation, and Citizenship: Lutheran Contributions to Public Theology," *Dialog*, vol. 49, no. 2 (summer 2010), pp. 108-114.

Haemig, Mary Jane, "The Confessional Basis of Lutheran Thinking on Church-State Issues" in *Church and State: Lutheran Perspectives*, ed. John R. Stumme (Fortress Press, 2003), [digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty\\_articles/327](https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/327)

Nessan, Craig L., "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 19 (2005), [gudribassakums.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/2005-two-kingdoms-nessan.pdf](https://www.gudribassakums.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/2005-two-kingdoms-nessan.pdf)

Reumann, Amy, "Faith-based Advocacy With Today's United States Government," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, vol. 20, no. 2 (April/May 2020), [learn.elca.org/jle/faith-based-advocacy-with-todays-united-states-government-summary-at-lutheran-ethicists-gathering-2020/](https://www.learn.elca.org/jle/faith-based-advocacy-with-todays-united-states-government-summary-at-lutheran-ethicists-gathering-2020/)

### BOOKS

Carty, Jarrett A., *God and Government: Martin Luther's Political Thought*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017). PG

Gorski, Philip S., and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

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

**Book of Concord:** A collection of writings from 1580, published on the 50th anniversary of the 1530 Augsburg Confession, that were subscribed to by some 80 princely and municipal governments and are generally understood as authoritative documents of the Evangelical/Lutheran movement. The most widely adopted include the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and Luther's catechisms, but all have some status among today's Evangelical/Lutheran churches. **Bonhoeffer, Dietrich:** German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident. Among other things, he is known for his writings on the Christian role in civic engagement and was a key founding member of the Confessing Church. (See "Confessing Church.")

**Cheap grace:** A term from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship* that he describes as preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, as grace without discipleship, as grace without the cross, and as Christian faith without Jesus Christ, the living and incarnate one.

**Christian nationalism:** A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of certain Christian views with American civic life. This political ideology, whether explicit or not, includes the beliefs that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired and enjoys godly status, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S., that the nation holds a special status in God's eyes, and that good Americans must hold Christian beliefs. Proponents range from those who believe the U.S. should be declared a Christian nation (approximately 21% of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, anti-democratic, or gang like.

**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.

**Clericalism:** The belief, policy, and practice maintaining the power of a religious hierarchy.

**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."

**Law and Gospel:** Expresses the key Lutheran emphasis that God's Word and work in human society occur under different means. "Law" is understood to have two forms: (1) as a directive and corrective for society (first, or civil, use) and (2) judgment on sin (second, or theological, use). The term "Gospel" is the good news of God's mercy, received in faith on account of Jesus Christ.

**Luther, Martin (1483-1546):** German priest, theologian, author, and professor. He was a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation and is the namesake of Lutheranism.

**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.

**Priesthood of all believers:** The view elaborated in the Reformation that all baptized Christians enjoy equal spiritual status in the sight of God, with equal capacity to have faith, pray, give witness, and do what is God-pleasing. See, for instance, 1 Peter 2:9: “You are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation.”

**Theology:** Can indicate academic or abstract reflection, but use of the term in this study refers to faithful talk about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, engages in theology when expressing thoughts about God, the church, God in relation to civic life, etc.

**Three estates:** Used to designate the broadest divisions of social hierarchy in Christendom (Christian Europe) from the Middle Ages to early modern Europe. There is some variation in meaning, depending on the time and locale invoked. In Reformation thinking, the three overarching divisions (estates) were identified as the church, the government, and the family (which included all economic functions).

**Two kingdoms:** A traditional theological term from the Reformation regarding the proper distinction of God’s activity in the world: through secular means, such as government, versus God’s gracious activity in the church. ELCA teaching describes this as God’s two ways or two hands rather than as two kingdoms. God’s “right hand” conveys the tangible power of God’s love and forgiveness to people of faith, which stirs us to forgive others, to express mutual love and care, and to strive for justice. God’s “left hand” works through human roles, structures, and institutions to foster the social well-being of the people and the world God creates. The ELCA teaches that God’s two ways of governing are both necessary and interrelated. The institutions of government and church are distinct but have appropriate functional interaction.

**Word:** Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom God’s message to us as both Law and Gospel reveals God’s judgment and mercy. The ELCA constitution holds that the Word is expressed in creation and in the history of Israel but is centered in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are the written Word of God in the sense that they are inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through the authors as they record and announce God’s revelation centering Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.



## SESSION 3 VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Greetings! My name is Anthony Bateza, and I am a pastor in the ELCA and religion professor at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

It is an honor to be with you as we continue discussing the relationship of Christian faith, politics, and our lives together in congregations and communities. In previous sessions, we introduced the purpose of this study and provided some tools for having difficult conversations about important issues. Today we will ground our reflections in Lutheran soil by asking “What are Lutheran views on civic life?”

We will discuss both the gifts and ongoing challenges of our Lutheran heritage, looking to history and theology for guidance on how to authentically embody our values in communities across the ELCA.

As we approach these questions as Lutherans, we have a number of valuable sources to draw from: chief among them, the biblical witness and *The Book of Concord*, which presents for us the church’s wisdom and provides a true witness and valid interpretation of our common faith. Along with these texts, we also draw from the diverse collection of individuals and contexts where Lutherans and others have sought to faithfully live out their commitment to God in their civic and political communities.

As a Luther scholar, I am, not surprisingly, really interested in Martin Luther! But despite the obvious historical connections, I believe we are drawn back to dear Brother Martin because his 16th-century ideas and experiences remain insightful and inspiring in our own time.

In confirmation classes and adult education hours, sitting around a table for coffee, or hiking along trails at Lutheran camps, people are drawn in by the details of Luther’s life. Moved by an undeniable intellect and his unquenchable passion for God’s people, Luther labored to remove the burdens and tear down the barriers keeping people from experiencing the love of God in Christ. Instead of a cruel or distant judge, Luther found in the Bible and the message of the gospel the story of a loving God, a God always at work, calling out injustice, forgiving sinners, and reconciling the world.

We know that spiritual, material, and political features of our lives can be distinguished even if they are not always easily separated. While trying to reform the church, Luther relied on governmental protection and celebrated the proper functioning of government. In his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer, for example, Luther interprets the petition where we ask God for our “daily bread” as a request for all the necessities of our lives: food, clothing, good relationships, and a good government with “upright and faithful rulers.”

One of the theological ideas that emerged is often called the teaching about God’s “two kingdoms” or “two governments.” Luther spoke about God’s kingdoms in different ways depending on the situation and challenges that confronted him.

Sometimes he used this “two kingdoms” language to describe God’s two ways of moving and guiding the world, thinking about God as using God’s right and left hands. With God’s right hand, we are persuaded and transformed, often in unpredictable and invisible ways that hearts and minds are reshaped. With God’s right hand, for example, faith is given, as we come to know, love, and trust God because of what God does in and through us.

With God’s left hand, the movement is less smooth and more confrontational. We feel the tension between what God demands and our own conflicted desires. God’s left hand pushes, cajoles, and forces us through laws, boundaries, and other means.

Luther also used this “two kingdoms” language to describe how the church and the government operate in different ways. In the church, God uses the Word and the Gospel to bring sinners to their forgiveness in

Christ. In the government, by contrast, laws constrain and judges convict, and the threat of punishment by figurative and literal swords is wielded in order to preserve peace, a needed check for people who might devour one another if left to their own devices.

Concerns about sustaining peace and avoiding the brutalities of war was not an idle fear for the reformers. They saw firsthand how princes and rulers can abuse their power, exploiting their subjects for selfish gain. Conversely, they also saw the horrors that come when people take up arms against the authorities and how the burdens of war are so often borne unequally by the most vulnerable—the poor, widows, children.

In the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530, we are reminded “that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God,” meaning that Christians can and should take on positions of leadership and service in civic affairs.

In times of abundance, through good leaders and rulers like Moses, David, or Luther’s Elector Frederick, God’s benefits and care are easy to see.

While facing cruel tyrants like King Herod, knowing what it means to see and follow God can be more difficult. At the end of the day, the Confessions acknowledge that there are times when the command of a political authority ought not be obeyed (AC XVII).

Sometimes we have all-too-easily sided with those in power and needed courageous souls like Dietrich Bonhoeffer to call us away from “cheap grace” and toward that costly discipleship that Christ demands.

Sometimes calls for moderation have promoted justice, but we know that, at other times, we have valued comfortable patience when uncomfortable action was required.

Lutheran beliefs and practices have always sought a sense of balance, neither over- or undervaluing our labors in life to challenge injustice and improve political arrangements.

We continue to keep our eyes and ears open for God’s calling, both as we gather in prayer in churches and on street corners, walking down the aisle toward the altar, or marching down the street for justice.

The Lutheran tradition gives us the chance to confess our mistakes and to try again, and it provides us with wonderful tools for understanding this calling.

One framework has been the Lutheran teaching about God’s Three Estates. The spiritual estate, or the church, is tasked with proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, bringing together God’s people to hear the message of forgiveness as we are nourished by word and sacrament.

The government or political estate is also valued and preserved by God to maintain earthly justice and enable the flourishing of people everywhere.

Finally, the reformers placed both our family relationships and our economic life together under the household. Here we are loved and cared for, called to use the resources God has provided for the care of others.

The shape these estates take vary. There is no divine mandate that we must organize our religious communities, political institutions, or intimate familial relationships in one way or other.

Indeed, the great diversity and variety of these arrangements among all people of the earth can be inspiring as we are reminded of how far and wide God’s care for all continues to reach. All have been created in God’s image, and all are protected and loved by a God who continues to act through our earthly institutions and relationships.

In whatever form, there is good and bad to be found, and behind it all we find a God working for our good in ways that can appear brilliantly clear or painfully opaque.

In our church, we recognize these complexities of God's action and our action. While we rightly say that we are about "God's Work. Our Hands.," we do not pretend to have all the answers about what God is up to or what we should do next.

This can be a breath of fresh air in a polarized political environment, when battle lines are clearly drawn and some speak with unflappable certainty about the best policies for our future.

As Lutherans like to put it, we are simultaneously sinners and saints. Our pull towards presumption and confidence is checked by our need for correction and confession. Our pull towards fear or acquiescence is checked by our need to do good works and continue our daily struggle against sin and injustice.

At our best, Lutherans embody a spirit of shared deliberation and authority. Fragments of this can be found in our commitment to the priesthood of all believers, our resistance to the idea that any one of us could stand above the other given ultimate and final equality of all as we stand before our God.

The shared work of instruction, correction, and reflection marked one of the biggest breaks from certain kinds of clericalism and hierarchies in Luther's time. Likewise, our congregations and communities can serve as places of genuine deliberation. Marked with the cross of Christ, we are freed from having to save ourselves or prove ourselves, and so we are freed for open and honest conversation about our hopes, fears, aspirations, and ideals. These touch all aspects of our lives, every corner of our religious, political, familial, and economic relationships.

And our deliberation and wrestling does not keep us from action. Lutheran Services in America remains one of the largest private service providers in the nation, a \$23 billion network of agencies and caregivers that reaches 1 in 50 people in the country each year.

Lutheran advocacy offices are spread across the country, working together with congregations, coalitions, and political leaders to address issues such as hunger, poverty, racism, and care of God's creation.

Luther could not have imagined where we would be today, as people living in a democracy with opportunities and challenges so different from his 16th-century political world. And so, it is up to us, working together in community, to sort out what needs to be lifted up and what should be set aside.

I thank you for taking on some of that work in this study, as you come together in a spirit of respect and charity, out of a shared commitment to the power of God's love and the need to see that love embodied in our lives as the political creatures that we are. Thank you for coming together in this space, and I look forward to being inspired by your questions, responses, and ongoing efforts to live lives of worth and service as siblings in Christ and neighbors to all.

## **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.**