

## **An FAQ regarding public comment on “The Draft of a Social Message on Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy”**

### **What am I invited to do?**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) develops its social-teaching documents through a standard protocol that encourages individuals from each of our church's three expressions (congregations, synods, churchwide) to review and comment at identified points. From March 20 to May 27, 2020, you are invited to read a draft of a social message on government and civic engagement and share your thoughts about it.

### **How do I do this?**

There are two ways to share your comments. 1) You are encouraged to read the Draft at <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Government> and use the link found there to connect to the response survey form. 2) You also are welcome to write your thoughts in an email to [draftsocialmessage@elca.org](mailto:draftsocialmessage@elca.org). All comments received by May 27 will be reviewed by researchers and members of the consulting team. (A report summarizing response patterns will be prepared and shared with the ELCA Church Council.) Feel free to share the draft with others and perhaps have online conversations. Responses from individuals or groups are welcome. Non-ELCA individuals are welcome to share their thoughts but are asked to indicate their non-affiliation near the end of the survey.

### **What is the overall project?**

The goal is to develop an ELCA social message with an accompanying basic study guide by the end of July 2020. This project was set in motion in November 2019 when the ELCA Church Council authorized “the development of a social message on the vocation of citizenship, civic engagement, and church and state” (CC19.11.47w).

### **What are social messages, and how are they developed?**

Social messages are teaching documents of the ELCA focused on special social topics. They are intended to focus attention and urge action on timely, pressing matters of social concern to church and society. As such they are to be consistent with existing ELCA social teaching but to elaborate and extend this church's address to a topic. The development of a message is directed by the director for theological ethics in the Office of the Presiding Bishop and has utilized a consulting group of 12 people. The creation of this draft has involved rounds of response by consultants and review by members of the Conference of Bishops and the ELCA Church Council. The council is the governing body that will consider the message for adoption in June. (It will require a two-thirds approval.) As ELCA social teachings, a message governs the corporate witness and policies of the ELCA but does not bind the consciences of members.

**Where can I see examples of social messages?**

The ELCA currently has 14 such messages on a diverse range of topics, from immigration to suicide to human rights to gender-based violence. All of them can be accessed at [www.ELCA.org/socialmessages](http://www.ELCA.org/socialmessages).

**What is the identified need?**

A social message on this topic was requested by CWA 2019, although ELCA procedure required authorization by the Church Council. Those speaking in favor of this social message stressed several reasons for the request, which have helped shape the process and focus the message.

- On themes such as the call to citizenship, civic engagement, and the nature of government, the social teaching of the Lutheran heritage and the ELCA is not well known to many, is not gathered in one place, and is not presented in language accessible to the average church member.
- The ELCA has a pressing need for an accessible official teaching document addressing how and why Christians as citizens and the church as a corporate body should be active in the public square.
- The current political rhetoric and climate demand a fast-tracked message to help Christians as they participate in this electoral cycle.
- While the current political situation has sharpened this need, a churchwide process that invites all members to join in discernment on these topics is long overdue, and the writing process can open up conversation and provide a tool for years to come.

What is the anticipated character of the message?

- Short and pithy;
- Well-focused on the most important and relevant themes; and
- Easily accessible to average adult readers. (A brief study guide for the message will be prepared in July as a supplemental resource.)

**What are the parameters for the message's development?**

Social messages are framed and constrained by ELCA teaching sources even as a message elaborates on them or provides for deliberation. The themes present in this message are identifiable in these sources:

1. The Holy Scriptures
2. The ELCA constitution
3. ELCA social statements such as *Church in Society*, *The Church and Criminal Justice*, and *For Peace in God's World*, as well as several relevant social policy resolutions
4. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*

*ELCA resources mentioned above all are available at [www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements).*